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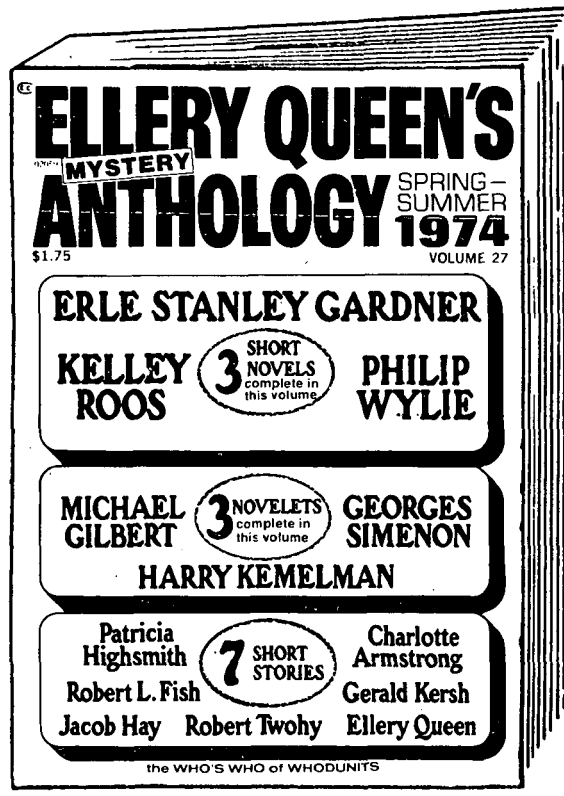

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Mystery Magazine

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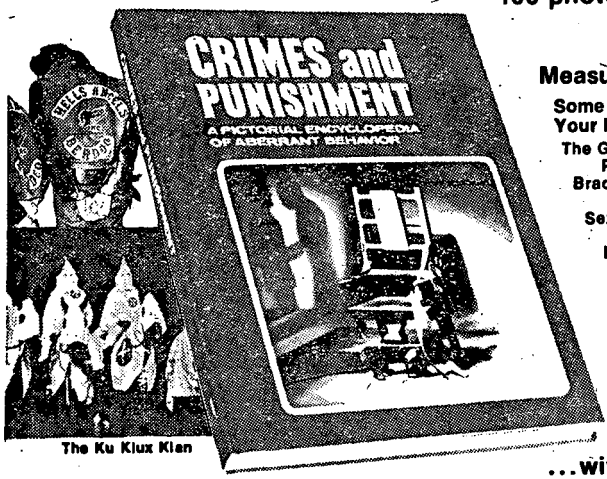

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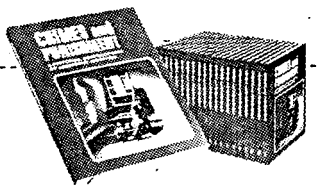

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a *NEW* Jericho story by

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John Jericho, the giant Viking-bearded artist with a deep antipathy to violence, finds himself in a violent situation. He could play it safe, but that wasn't Jericho's style. No way.

"He began to recall a sea of faces from his past . . . dark faces, pale faces, frightened faces . . ."

Another tingler about the man who never learned to run away from danger when someone's life was at stake, including his own . . .

JERICHO AND THE SEA OF FACES

by HUGH PENTECOST

Jeff Tanner's cottage was on the lakefront in the New England town of Winfield, in the foothills of the Berkshires. The lake, which had an unpronounceable Indian name, was about three miles long, completely encircled by woodland. If you stood on the bank of the lake it would almost appear to be a wilderness, until you noticed a score or more of small docks with sailboats, rowboats, and canoes moored alongside, or overturned and beached on the shore. No power boats were allowed on the lake.

Actually, there were dozens of cottages built behind the wood line. Tanner's was one of them. The whole area seemed beautifully relaxed, a haven for people who liked peace and quiet and loathed thruways and gasoline fumes and vacation hysteria. There was no history of violence in the area, unless the lake trout and other fish could be heard. Hunting in the area surrounding the lake was forbidden, and it had become a paradise for birds and wildlife. Migrators seemed to know of it, and literally thousands of Canada geese were known to stop there on their flights north and south.

There had been a few drown-

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ings in the lake over the years, which is not unusual for any water resort. But on a warm, moonlit August night a man missed being murdered in Jeff Tanner's cottage by a literal matter of inches. The man was John Jericho, internationally known artist and adventurer.

Jericho had been sitting in the high-backed overstuffed armchair in front of the screened picture window that opened onto the lake. He was reading — *Jane Eyre,* of all things — a crooked-neck lamp bent over his left shoulder. His chair was turned sideways to the screened window, his huge six-foot-six body almost hidden by the high wings of the chair.

The sound of a gunshot was something he reacted to instantly, at the same moment that the bullet hit the chair back and buried itself in the horsehair stuffing just next to his right temple. Violence was not something new to John Jericho. He was not a man who would mistake a gunshot for the backfiring of an automobile.

He was out of the chair and down flat on the floor in an instinctive reaction. The bullet had only missed him by inches, but even as he lay there on the floor, waiting and listening for someone to make the next move, it didn't occur to him for a moment that the bullet had been meant for him. This was Jeff Tanner's cottage, and Jericho knew that there were people who might want Jeff Tanner permanently silenced.

Tanner was what used to be called, in the old days, a journalist. He had started out after college as a reporter on the New York *World-Telegram,* and he had become a very good one, earning a byline for most of his stories. After touching a lot of different bases, politics and power had become his "thing." He stepped on a lot of toes and bloodied a lot of noses along the way. Politicians learned to hate him and at the same time respect him. You had to play it straight with Jeff Tanner or get the donkey tail pinned on you in public. Big money groups, seeking power through the judicious distribution of cash, instantly threw up smokescreens when Jeff Tanner appeared in their neck of the woods.

When the *World-Telegram* died, as so many great newspapers have in the last couple of decades, Tanner decided to become a freelance instead of looking for another job in a desperately overcrowded field. His brilliance kept him eating handsomely.

Somewhere along the way — actually at a Peace demonstration in Washington—Tanner

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met the giant red-bearded artist, John Jericho. They hit it off at once, each of them dedicated passionately to Truth. They both fought against violence in their own way, and their primary targets were not the Mafia or the Syndicate or organized crime, but the sleek, sunlamp-tanned men who sat behind big flat-topped desks and manipulated the money markets as well as world politics.

Jericho and Tanner met accidentally at the Players Club late in July of that summer. Tanner, slim, dark, with a fire burning behind his dark eyes, was onto something big.

"I can't tell you about it, Johnny," he said that day at the Players, "except that if I can dig up a few more solid facts the whole system may come tumbling down like Humpty Dumpty, never to be put together again."

"Good luck," Jericho said, chewing on the stem of a charred black pipe. "Since you won't tell me what it is, let's change the subject. Now I need a change. Every now and then I have to remind myself that I am a painter and not a bullfighter. I need a little peace and solitude."

Tanner glanced at him with affection. "I'm not going to be in this part of the world for a while. I have a cottage on a lake up in Winfield—the Berkshires. It's about as isolated as you could ask for in this day and age when the whole world is becoming one mass suburbia. You want it for a month it's yours."

Which explains how Jericho came to be lying on the floor of Tanner's living room on a moonlit August night, waiting for a sniper to make another move.

Jericho thought quite calmly about his own next move. He could reach up and turn off the light. Darkness would be safer, and yet if he turned off the light the sniper would know that he had missed, or missed a fatal wounding. If the light stayed on he might come into the cottage to make sure.

Jericho, staying flat to the floor, inched his way toward the dark kitchen. Very slowly he pulled himself up to a standing position and waited, listening. There were no sounds that didn't belong there—a chorus of bullfrogs down at the lake's edge, the shrill cry of a night bird. He listened for the sound of a car. The sniper might have been convinced and would take off the way he had come.

But there was no car sound. He strained for a cautious footstep outside the cottage—a snapping twig, the click of the

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front-door catch, or the one that opened out onto the deck beyond the picture window. An owl hooted—that was all.

There was, he remembered, a wall phone in the kitchen. Tanner's cottage was isolated, but with all the comforts of home. Suburbia was creeping in, even here. In a low voice he asked the operator to connect him with the State Trooper barracks. He was answered by a flat impersonal voice. He explained who he was, where he was, and what had happened.

"You're sure you're not just imagining things?" the flat voice asked.

"The bullet is buried in the chair," Jericho said. "I haven't touched it."

"Sit tight," the flat voice said. "Stay out of sight."

In the glove compartment of the red Mercedes parked at the rear of Tanner's cottage Jericho had a handgun. He would, he knew, feel a great deal more comfortable if he had it on him. He moved to the kitchen door and looked out through the screen. Trees cut out the moonlight here and the car was just a dark shadow, a few yards away.

He reached up, disengaged the spring on the door, and pushed it open. The operation was noiseless. He stepped out into the clear and moved quickly to the car. There he hesitated. When he opened the car a little light would go on inside. If the sniper was watching—

Then, suddenly, Jericho laughed. Damned idiot! The sniper wasn't after *him*. He should turn on every bloody light in the place so that the sniper could see Jericho was the wrong man.

He went back into the kitchen and switched on the lights, then to the living room and switched on more lights. He stood framed in the picture window. He could see the hole in the screen made by the sniper's bullet. It must be perfectly clear to the sniper now, if the sniper was still around, that he'd taken a pot shot at the wrong man.

After a moment Jericho went, openly, out to the Mercedes and got his gun from the glove compartment. The danger for him was over, but he still felt better with the gun in the pocket of his corduroy jacket.

The State Police were prompt. Jericho saw the car with the blinking red light on its roof approaching. Two troopers walked into the cottage—Sergeant Maddux and Trooper Brennan. They examined the screen. Brennan dug the bullet out of the chair and dropped it in an envelope.

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"All these lights," Maddux said. "You made yourself a perfect target, Mr. Jericho."

Jericho explained. "I suddenly realized the bullet wasn't meant for me," he said. "I don't know anyone in Winfield. I don't know anyone who'd be gunning for me. Best thing seemed to be to let him see he was shooting at the wrong guy."

"Risky," Maddux said. Brennan had gone outside.

"Well, anyway, he didn't shoot again," Jericho said.

Brennan came back. He had found the shell casing from a high-powered rifle. "He fired from two or three feet this side of Tanner's dock," he said. "Not more than twenty yards away."

"He must have seen you were the wrong guy from that close," Maddux said.

Jericho turned and sat down in the big wing chair, just as he had been sitting when the shot came. "The wings of this chair had my face hidden," he said. "About all he could have seen was the top of my head and my hands holding the book I was reading."

"Where is Tanner?" Maddux asked. "He should be warned somebody's out to get him."

"God knows where he is. He didn't tell me where he was going. He just told me I could use the cottage for a month. Maybe your post office has a forwarding address for him."

"We'll need a statement from you, Mr. Jericho. Don't tramp around outside. We'll have to wait till daylight to make any kind of search for a trail," Maddux said.

And so Jericho went to bed. He slept like a baby.

When Jericho woke the next morning, with the sun streaming through his bedroom window, Maddux and company were already outside on the grounds, trying to pick up the sniper's trail. They came to the conclusion he had escaped in a canoe, or a small boat of some kind, drifted around a bend in the lake some fifty yards from Tanner's dock while Jericho was lying on the floor waiting for something more to happen.

The county prosecutor, a man named Cleghorn, asked a few questions. They were about Jeff Tanner mostly. Did Jericho know if Tanner had any enemies?

"I just know he was working with a big story with political overtones," Jericho said. "He told me he was looking for facts that might 'bring the whole system tumbling down like Humpty Dumpty'."

"But you haven't any notion what facts or who he was after?" Cleghorn asked.

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"Not the foggiest."

Cleghorn was in his mid-forties, Jericho guessed; sandy hair thinning at the temples, bright and inquisitive blue eyes. He was tanned and fit-looking. He seemed quite relaxed, hands in his pockets jiggling coins or keys.

"No forwarding address at the post office," Cleghorn said. He smiled faintly. "He didn't tell you where he could be reached—I mean, in case the plumbing broke down or someone stole his boat?"

"I'm supposed to be a big boy, able to handle such things. I'm not even sure Tanner knew where he was going. He was on a trail that could lead him anywhere."

"Well, thanks for your help, Mr. Jericho. I don't think we'll need you any more. Watch yourself after dark. He might come back, not realizing he missed the wrong man."

"I wouldn't mind if you spread the word around town so that he would hear it," Jericho said. "That I'm the wrong man, I mean."

He took his painting gear out into the woods and onto a high point of land overlooking the lake. His eye was caught by a small white sailboat with a bright red sail. He set up his easel and prepared his palette — blue-green for the water, white for the sailboat and clouds, another blue for the sky, dark greens, light greens, browns for the woods, and a dab of scarlet for the sail. He began to work, completely absorbed in what he was starting.

The gunshot came from behind him, burned his cheek, and went straight through the center of his canvas.

For the second time in a space of hours Jericho hit the deck. He crawled through the underbrush to a spot surrounded by thick evergreen trees. He could still see the red sail tacking slowly back and forth across the lake. There was no sound of anyone coming or going; no sound of anything except his own breathing and the thumping of his heart against his ribs.

This time there could be no doubt the shot had been meant for him. Broad daylight, out in the open, no possibility of mistaking his 240 pounds, his massive shoulders, his red Viking beard; Tanner was slim, dark, 160 pounds. He touched his cheek and his fingers came away stained with blood. It had been that close.

Jericho stayed crouching in the protection of the evergreens. He reached into his jacket pocket and was reassured by the feel of his handgun. Who in God's name was so intent on

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killing him? He didn't know anybody in Winfield, though it was possible there was someone he had no reason to think lived here.

But who, if he were standing in the middle of Times Square, would want to kill him? He sat with his back against a tree, gun in his hand, trying to think, and at the same time trying to listen for someone taking off through the woods.

He began to recall a sea of faces from his past—the faces of people who might hate him enough to want to kill him. He had been involved with crime, with violence, in the past. He had helped send men to prison. He had stripped the gears in a score of criminal conspiracies.

The faces floated past him, none of them coming really clear. Not one of the faces stood out so that he could say there is a man who hates me enough to track me down, to risk capture, enough to want to kill me. Dark faces, pale faces, frightened faces, faces red with anger and frustration. They blurred together. But not one of them stepped downstage and center.

His breathing was normal again, his heartbeat steady. It was a miracle, he thought, that he was still alive. A high-powered rifle fired at close range by a man clever enough to make a noiseless escape might have missed him last night in the chair. But just now he had been standing out in the open, with nothing to interfere with a steady careful aim. Why not a second shot when Jericho moved?

He suddenly knew the answer, as though the marksman had confessed. Killing had *not* been intended. The sniper had *not* been inefficient, he had been superskillful. He had missed by inches last night; he had missed by the distance of a too-close shave this morning. He had missed on purpose.

Why?

To frighten Jericho off, to drive him away from Winfield. There was someone here he did know; someone who, if he was seen by Jericho, would be in deep trouble. Winfield was a hiding place for someone, a hiding place that would be disclosed if Jericho saw a face out of the past.

It could not, Jericho thought, be someone who knew him well. Someone who really knew him would not have considered trying to frighten him away. Jericho had enough imagination to recognize danger, and to feel fear, but nothing in God's world would make him run away, run for safety.

Again the sea of faces paraded in front of his mind's

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eye. But none of them came clear.

Mr. Samuel Cleghorn, the county prosecutor, stood looking out of his office window at Winfield's village green, his back to Jericho. The artist noticed again the man's nervous habit of jiggling keys or coins in his pocket.

Jericho had done a little simple detective work out there in the woods. He had stood in front of his easel, exactly as he had been standing when the shot was fired. He had figured from that and the hole in his canvas the trajectory of the bullet, which had gone straight through the canvas and out into the lake.

After about half an hour of searching he had found the cartridge case. The sniper had stood about 30 yards away, almost directly behind his target. The case matched the one Trooper Brennan had found at the cottage. Same gun, almost certainly. The pine needles on the floor of the woods, springy and resilient, had retained no footprints.

"I think your theory makes sense," Cleghorn said. "What to do is the question. We can't take in everyone within a twenty-five-mile radius and let you have a look at them—until you see a face you remember."

"I propose to leave town," Jericho said.

"Perhaps that is best," Cleghorn said.

"Leave town ostentatiously—and come back not so ostentatiously," Jericho said.

Cleghorn turned back from the window. His smile was thin. "Somehow I can't imagine your coming back without being seen and without your man knowing," he said. "You're not a man who can disguise himself, Jericho. Your size, your coloring, your beard."

"There is, I understand, a Firemen's Carnival starting tonight."

Cleghorn nodded. "At the town athletic field."

"Almost everyone in the community—natives, summer people, transients—will go to it, won't they?" Jericho asked.

"It's the big event of the summer," Cleghorn said.

"So I'll leave this morning, making sure my departure is noted," Jericho said. "I will slip back tonight, find a place on the carnival grounds where I can look at the hundreds of faces."

"So you don't recognize a face, but he sees you," Cleghorn said. "He knows you haven't taken his warning seriously. This time he aims for the bull's-eye."

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"With hundreds of people around him?"

"The carnival is a noisy place, friend," Cleghorn said. "Band music, music from the merry-go-round, a shooting gallery where you aim at moving ducks for a prize, fireworks. A rifle could be fired from a safe place without a single soul paying the slightest attention."

"A chance I'll have to take," Jericho said. "When I leave this office I'm heading out of town. You pass the word that I've been scared away by someone taking pot shots at me."

"My best advice is for you to go and stay gone," Cleghorn said. "But if you insist—"

"I'll see you tonight after the carnival closes," Jericho said, "unless I see you before — with a hammerlock on the sniper if I spot him."

There were noises and smells out of his childhood—the calliope music from the merry-go-round, the clanging of bells at the shooting gallery as people fired at the moving ducks and hit, the endless chatter of the barkers at the various games and rides, the aroma of hot dogs, hamburgers, popcorn, and cotton candy.

Jericho had come through the regular admission gate. There was no other way except to run the risk of attracting even more attention. He could hope his man was not there to spot him right at the beginning.

He studied faces and saw none he recognized. There were armies of kids, bright-eyed, excited. The smaller ones were getting rides on a local fire engine and the larger, bolder ones were sampling the rides, the Ferris wheel, the Whiplash, the airplanes that whirled around a tall mast, almost upside-down when they reached top speed. Little girls screamed with a kind of terrified delight. The little boys looked self-consciously brave.

Jericho found a place between two tents not far from the entrance gate. People left the same way. His man would have to pass this way — if he came at all.

Jericho felt himself smiling. Somehow he had been reminded of Groucho Marx's famous crack: "I never forget a face, but I'll try to make an exception in your case." Jericho hoped to see a face that would instantly bring back a violent memory of some sort. He too never forgot a face and he was not going to make an exception in this case.

It was quite dark now and at the far end of the grounds they were beginning to send up Roman candles and rockets that burst in the air and sent show-

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ers of color cascading toward the ground. The guns in the shooting gallery cracked and the bells rang. Directly opposite him little girls screamed as the airplane ride spun them dizzily.

The computer that is the human mind operates a little more erratically than an IBM machine. You can't press a button and ask for the face of someone who hates you. What comes out of that human computer is the result of uncontrolled impulses—a sight, a sound, a smell, a word. Listening to the little girls scream and watching the toy planes swirl, Jericho's computer brought up the image of a face that was not a face.

A couple of years ago he had been on a flight from New York to Atlanta where some of his paintings were being exhibited in a one-man show. Forty-five minutes out of New York the plane was taken over by a skyjacker, a bank robber escaping with his loot. The man had an automatic rifle and he kept two stewardesses in front of him as a shield. The pilot was ordered to alter his course for Cuba. You don't play the hero in such a situation, not with 70 innocent passengers aboard.

Jericho remembered studying the skyjacker carefully in the hope of remembering him if he ever saw him again. He couldn't remember him by his face because he had no visible face. He was wearing a stocking mask pulled over his head. But there *was* a way he would remember the skyjacker if he ever saw him again.

Jericho moistened his lips. His mouth felt dry.

He watched the swinging toy planes circle lower and lower. He watched the deliriously happy kids climbing out, shouting at each other. There was only one face before him now, a masked face.

And he remembered words he had spoken to the skyjacker as the man left the plane in Havana, still keeping the two stewardesses as a shield. It had been reasonably foolhardy because the man could have shot Jericho dead then and there. He had told the man how he would recognize him if he ever saw him again.

The crowd was slowly drifting toward home. The fireworks display was over. The town band had packed up its instruments. Exhausted kids, some of them looking a little green around the gills from too many hot dogs and too much candy, were being shepherded home by parents.

Jericho came out from between the tents where he had stationed himself. He felt in the pocket of his coat for the handgun, and closed his hand over the butt. Near the ticket win-

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dow he saw Samuel Cleghorn, the county prosecutor, watching some of the local firemen counting the gate receipts.

Cleghorn saw him coming and he smiled a greeting, his hands in his pockets, again nervously jiggling his coins or keys.

"Any luck?" Cleghorn asked.

"I didn't see a face I knew," Jericho said.

"He may have seen you," Cleghorn said.

"I'm sure he did," Jericho said. A muscle rippled along the line of his jaw, under his bright red beard. He reached in his pants pocket with his left hand and produced a dollar bill. "Can you change this dollar for me, Cleghorn? I'd like to make a phone call from that outdoor booth over there."

"I'm afraid I don't have any change," Cleghorn said. He stopped the nervous jingling in his pocket.

"Maybe we should quit playing games," Jericho said, and his voice was unnaturally calm.

"Games?" Cleghorn said. His eyes had narrowed.

"I told you once long ago that I'd recognize you if I ever saw you again," Jericho said.

"Long ago?"

"Eastern flight from New York to Atlanta," Jericho said.

"I've never been to Atlanta," Cleghorn said.

"I'm prepared to believe that," Jericho said. "We didn't get to Atlanta. Havana. Remember?"

"I don't have any idea what you're—"

"Every time I've seen you today, Cleghorn, you've had your hands in your pocket. I'd like to look at your hands."

Cleghorn drew a deep shuddering breath. "I should have shot you that day in Havana," he said. "You told me you'd know me by my hands—by the scars. My hands were damn near burned off when I was a kid." He looked toward the parking lot where he probably had a car. "Why did you have to turn up here? I've gotten turned around. I've become a part of this community, elected to a good job, playing it on the level. You were the one man in the whole world who could uncover my past. Why don't you go away and let me alone?"

"Sorry," Jericho said.

Cleghorn sighed. "I have you covered from my pocket, Jericho. Walk over with me to my car. I'm sorry too, but—"

"And I have you covered from my pocket," Jericho said. "I'm aiming right at your stomach. We can shoot it out here or you can throw in the towel. I suggest you have a better chance with the courts than you have with me."

Very slowly Cleghorn took his scarred hands out of his pocket. There was no gun. "I'm not a killer," he said. "I've had

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three chances to kill you and I never really tried. I only wanted you to go away!"

"That's every criminal's dream," Jericho said, "that trouble won't close in, that it will just go away."

They walked together, like old friends in a friendly conversation, slowly, toward a State Trooper who was standing outside his car parked on the street.

"Why didn't you wear gloves on that plane?" Jericho asked. "Your hands were so noticeable."

"I found at the last moment I couldn't handle that submachine gun with gloves on," Cleghorn said.

"Why not wear gloves here, when you saw me coming?"

"Or stay out of sight?" Cleghorn's laugh was bitter. "I had been delegated to go to Tanner's cottage to ask you to donate a painting to be auctioned for the benefit of the local hospital. I couldn't duck it. Wouldn't gloves on a hot August day make you wonder, perhaps even ask? Maybe, I thought, you'd have some kind of sixth sense about me. Better to frighten you off if I could. But knowing your reputation, I should have known better."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH...

ALL-NEW Issue — 13 NEW stories — including

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ROBERT L. FISH *(about Schlock Homes)*

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a *NEW* crime story by

MIRIAM SHARMAN

Mark Venner had a nightmare, the same nightmare, night after night. And he had good reason to have it. But now he was near the breaking point — a danger to himself, to his wife Ann, and to the company for which he worked. And Ann too was near the end of her rope.

The dramatic story of the aftermath of a crime . . .

THE BREAKING POINT

by MIRIAM SHARMAN

The dashboard clock, livid in the darkness, registered 9:55. The shrill whistle of the oncoming train rose to a shrieking crescendo. His car crashed against it, splintering into a thousand fragments.

Mark Venner struggled out of his tormented sleep, soaked in perspiration, shivering with shock. In the twin bed his wife was already awake.

"I'm sorry, Ann," he mumbled. "I've disturbed you again."

"It doesn't matter," she replied gently. He put on his dressing gown. "I'll come down with you," she added, quickly.

His reply came mechanically. "Don't get up. I'll be all right."

She shook her head, smiled, wrapped her housecoat round her small slight body, and followed him downstairs. In a few minutes they were seated on the comfortable sofa in front of the electric fire, sipping hot milk.

He leaned back wearily. "I never want to sleep again. It's always the same nightmare. . .every night now." He shut his eyes as if to blot it out. "It's always the. . .accident." He turned to look into his wife's face. "Always the. . .accident."

Harsh racking sobs shook him. Ann leaned forward and rested her hand in his. He clutched it. "Mark, dear," she said gently. "You mustn't give way. It's over now, it happened eighteen months ago, why can't

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you forget it? Let me help you."

His haggard eyes rested on her, weighing her, finding her wanting. "You talk as if it was all my doing!"

"No, no." For the moment she had forgotten how touchy he had become. "I mean, we'll help each other."

"But I was there, on the spot! *You* don't have to live with that shrieking train, that speeding car, John's blood!" He turned away from her. "If only I could get some sleep, dreamless sleep. . .no nightmares. . ."

There was a long silence. Ann cast around her mind for something to say that would not trigger off another surge of self-pity. It was better to remain silent than say the wrong thing. Mark took a small bottle from his dressing-gown pocket and emptied a tablet from it onto the table. Then he lit a cigarette and inhaled it deeply. He took a sip of his milk and swallowed the tablet.

"Take two tonight," she said. She glanced at her watch. "It's only quarter to three—five hours to go before you need get up." Her voice tailed away as he suddenly faced her, his mouth hard, his eyes suspicious. "It's quite safe," she added hurriedly. "I've done it myself in the past, after an operation."

He relaxed a little, shrugged, then swallowed a second tablet. "Won't do any good," he muttered. "Takes more than that to put me to sleep."

She moved closer to him, slipped her arm through his, and he sighed resignedly. They leaned back, shoulders touching, the physical contact seeming to soothe.

Mark's voice was firmer. "You're quite right, of course. What's done can't be undone. I might just as well enjoy all this—" He indicated the smart modern house with an all-embracing gesture. "And you," he added, slipping an arm round her, "as I did, at first."

"You will again. This phase you are going through will pass. Then everything will be all right."

"Yes, yes, everything will be all right. It's a phase, I'll get over it, don't you worry."

He felt her trembling as she turned toward him. His embrace was rough and passionate and she responded, as always, with equal passion. His fears and doubts dissolved in sheer physical sensation. This magic, Ann thought, with a small part of her mind, must be retained. It was her only hope of nursing Mark through these critical days.

The directors' meeting was coming to an end. Mark's pad was covered with his doodling.

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He had been unaware, or uncaring, of the disapproving frowns of the directors at his badly shaven face, his neglected hair, his messy chain-smoking.

"We come to the last item on the agenda," Sir Henry said. "The libel action."

Mark felt four pairs of eyes boring into him, hostile eyes, impatient eyes. He made an effort to pull himself together, but he couldn't keep the truculence out of his voice.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen. I take full responsibility. . .most unfortunate."

"As head of our legal department, Mark, you surely have some suggestion as to how we might cope with this unfortunate matter?" Sir Henry asked, with surprising restraint.

"Yes, yes, of course." Mark spoke quickly. "Settle it, admit liability with a good grace. I'll beat 'em down, get them to take a couple of thousand in settlement."

Arbuthnot, the Managing Director, exploded. "Really, Venner, is that all you have to say! You're supposed to vet every word we put into print! Pretty free and easy with the company's profits, aren't you? Seems an odd mistake for a lawyer to make, to fail to notice what everybody says is an obvious libel."

"I admit I made a mistake," Mark interrupted, his voice raised. He gripped the edge of the table, trying to control his trembling. What did it matter, he thought, what did anything matter? Night after night, no sleep, recurring nightmares, and Ann's panacea no longer effective. No word of forgiveness from these hard-faced colleagues either, he told himself, as he looked round the table.

"Can't a man make a mistake without everybody sitting in judgment on him as if he were a murderer—" He broke off abruptly and, in the indignant silence, stared unseeingly.

Sir Henry took matters in hand, politely but firmly. "Venner has a point, gentlemen. Men are only human after all and mistakes are made. I declare the meeting now closed."

He signaled to the others to go. Mark remained seated. Sir Henry sat down close to him. "I've known you too long, Mark, to take offense at your behavior. I've known you as a conscientious and loyal member of the staff of this company for years and we were grateful when you stepped into John Croft's shoes."

"Leave him out of this, Sir Henry, leave John out of this, please."

Sir Henry dropped his con-

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ciliatory manner. His voice became sharp. "That accident upset you more than you admitted at the time. And you've not spared yourself in your work here. But now, a big mistake. You've been overdoing it, you must take a rest."

Mark struggled to his feet. He felt as if he was suffocating under Sir Henry's tolerance. "The way you have been for the past months," the Chairman continued, now at his most syrupy, "you're no use to yourself nor, actually, to the firm."

There it was, Mark told himself, the veiled threat, the thing he had been expecting, the end of everything. "I feel done in," he muttered.

"That's what I'm saying," Sir Henry said briskly. "You need a rest. Take a month's leave, right away. I'll take the responsibility with the other directors." He patted Mark affectionately on the back. "And don't worry about that libel: I'll get young Lawrence to deal with it."

"Lawrence?" Mark sounded as alarmed as he felt. "But he's an outside lawyer, not one of ours!"

Sir Henry did not meet Mark's eyes as he shrugged his answer. "What of it? Let him handle this one case for us. There'll be plenty of work for you to do when you come back. Provided you're fit, of course." He was at the door. "Remember me to that charming wife of yours. Lucky man!"

Mark stared at the door for seconds after Sir Henry had closed it behind him. The words "lucky man" kept going round in his mind. He walked across the room, threw open the long windows, stepped forward onto the balcony and looked down to the distant street with its toy cars and miniature people.

He felt dizzy and shut his eyes. He recalled the many times he had parachuted from airplanes during the war, yet here he was, turning dizzy just looking down from a high building. There was little of his manhood left to him, he thought, welcoming the all too familiar wave of self-pity. Ann could no longer do anything for him. Whiskey was the only thing that could blunt his over-active imagination.

Ann telephoned three pubs before she located Mark.

"Yes, Mrs. Venner," the barmaid said. "He's here, been here since six o'clock."

Ann swallowed her pride. "Is he — has he had a lot to drink?"

The barmaid was matter-of-fact. "He's had too many double whiskies, but he's not drunk. He's just sitting here, by him-

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self, just sitting. Do you want me to call him to the phone?"

"No, no, thank you," Ann said hurriedly. "I—it's just that he's had no food." She hung up abruptly.

She was deeply worried and, unusual for her, uncertain how to handle the deteriorating situation. She must do something to stop the rot, to restore Mark to the man he had been—assured, virile, alight with charm. She phoned Sir Henry.

"Ann? How are you, my dear?" She was relieved at the friendliness in his voice. "Nice to hear from you," he added.

"I was wondering when you were coming to dinner, Sir Henry. You haven't been for a very long time."

"Hadn't we better leave it till you and Mark come back from holiday?"

Ann kept the surprise out of her voice. "Is the holiday so urgent, then?" she asked warily.

Sir Henry sounded wary, too. "Is Mark there? Or are you alone?"

"He's not here at the moment. He had to go out."

"Well, I can speak freely. Obviously he hasn't told you what happened today." She listened with dismay to Sir Henry's account of the scene in the boardroom. "I say he's in need of a good long rest," he ended.

"I'm glad you're on my side, Sir Henry," she said. "I've been trying to persuade him to have a break for ages now, but you know how he is — can't possibly leave the office at the moment, too much to do." A little light laugh accompanied the last words.

"That accident's preying on his mind," Sir Henry went on. "And he needs to have all his wits about him for his work, you know."

"I'm sure he'll take a holiday when he realizes it's your wish, Sir Henry. Leave it to me," she added firmly.

"I'm sure I can, my dear. We all know your determination and single-mindedness — and that's a compliment."

"Thank you, Sir Henry, you're good for my morale. Goodbye."

She would need all her single-mindedness, Ann thought, as she hung up, now that she could no longer depend on Mark's physical need of her. It would come back, of course, it must come back, she told herself fiercely. She loved him, she wanted nobody else, she must win him back.

She crossed to the fireplace and looked at herself in the mirror above it, seeking reassurance. The bloom on the pale clear skin owed nothing to

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make-up. The deep blue eyes looked back at her steadily. The soft dusky hair framed her face in contemporary fashion. She didn't look her 32 years.

The clock on the mantelpiece caught her eye. It was 9:40. There was nothing she could do but wait. She had barely settled herself in an armchair in front of the television set, determined to sit it out, when the telephone rang.

"Mark! For heaven's sake, where are you?"

His voice had the underlying whine with which she had become so familiar of late. "It's usual to leave a note," he said. "But I can't leave a note, so I'm phoning instead. I can't take any more, my beauty. You see, no more. . .it'll be just another accident. . .that damn level-crossing."

"Please, Mark, don't drive the car. Wait for me! I'll come for you. Mark, please!" She knew her last words had not reached him. He had hung up.

She took stock for a few moments, fighting down her panic. Her mind worked clearly enough when action was needed. The phone call had been an appeal for help even if Mark had been unaware of it himself. She could take the short cut from the house and reach the level-crossing before him.

She put on a coat, tied a scarf round her head, and started to walk briskly. Soon she found herself running.

Mark drove away from The Blue Anchor, increasing his speed as he reached the quiet country road he used so much. His thoughts were a jumble of images and words and he was mumbling to himself. He had drunk a lot of whiskey, but it had brought no relief this time. He'd practically lost his job and if whiskey let him down, where could he turn for forgetfulness? To Ann? Ann. . . the cause of his troubles.

The night was clear, the sky starlit. He heard the train's whistle in the near distance and glanced at the car clock. 9:55. On time, as usual. He pressed his foot down on the accelerator and sped forward. His timing was perfect, he thought; and so it should be, he had rehearsed it often enough. There it was—the open crossing. If he kept up this speed it would soon be over.

The noise in his ears was deafening now. His sweating hand slithered on the steering wheel. He felt his resolution weakening, he pictured the impact — of metal and flesh — his flesh. He took his foot off the accelerator, the car's speed dropped to 40, to 30, to 20. He was within a few yards of the

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train when he slammed on his brakes.

The sudden jerk flung him forward but did him no damage. His staring eyes followed the train's disappearing tail. Shaking and spent, he sat for several seconds slumped over the wheel.

He looked up and saw Ann's white-coated figure running across the rails toward him. She was at the car in a moment, her eyes frantic. At the sight of Mark, who turned his head slowly to look at her, she sighed with relief. She slipped into the passenger seat beside him, careful not to touch him.

"Lost my nerve. Hadn't the guts to do to myself what I did to John." His voice was bitter. "Rotten coward, that's what I've become."

Ann picked her way carefully through the brittle moment.

"Mark, let's go home. I'll drive."

He licked his lips and rubbed his dirty, sweaty hands together. "I've got to get out of this thing." He fumbled with his door handle. "I'm suffocating. I'll walk."

"I'll come with you."

He looked at her, wanting to reject her, but he could not. He shrugged and got out of the car. Ann slipped into the driver's seat and steered the car onto the verge.

"I'll empty the petrol tank," she said.

"You thing of everything." At the sneering words Ann whirled around, taken aback. She braced herself for worse to come. He would take it out on her because he had just failed himself. "Like you did with John," he said harshly. "The clocks, the door handles of the car — your brains and my brawn!"

She kept all emotion out of her voice. "If you don't go away for a complete change, you'll collapse, for good and all."

"And that would never do, would it? I might give the game away altogether and then where would you be?"

"You'll lose your job if you go on like this."

"Now there's a thought! Got John out of the way so as to step into his job, but John's still in the way!"

"Mark, what about us?" She made the direct appeal deliberately. "We wanted each other, that was why. The job was a secondary consideration. Wasn't it, Mark?"

He gestured miserably, his resentment melting as he let memories flood back. "It all seemed worth it at the time. So much to gain. And I was a man then, not the wreck I am today." Anger mounted. "And you're to blame for that, for everything, everything!"

He leaned against a fender

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and buried his head in his hands. Ann hesitated, then came round the car and stood beside him. "Look, Mark, we're in a mess and we've got to get out of it and we can only do that by our own efforts. You have to rest or there's no saying what will happen."

"You mean I'm a danger to you," he snapped. "I might make a clean breast of it and then you'd be in trouble."

Ann wondered at her own patience. She had never shown it toward John. "It's as much a danger to you as it is to me," she said quietly. "If you say too much, what will happen to you?"

"You don't give a damn what they do to me!"

"I care more than anything in the world. I have no life apart from you, Mark. I love you."

He turned to look at her. "I'd like to believe that," he sighed. "But John, he keeps getting in the way, he's everywhere, and I can't get rid of him."

She placed her hand on his arm and there was a moment of tenderness as they sat together. "As long as we keep close to each other," she said, "no rows, no recriminations, we'll see it through."

He nodded wearily. His dark haggard eyes and gaunt face looked at peace. He stood up and gently pulled her to her feet. She leaned toward him and as their bodies touched, he accepted her kiss, warm enough on her part but utterly without feeling on his. She swallowed her disappointment. They started the short walk home, side by side, but with a twelve-inch gap between them.

The police were on the telephone early the following morning.

"Yes. Mrs. Venner speaking. Oh, thank you. We were just going to do something about it. Yes, ran out of petrol. Thank you, I'll be right over."

Mark was on his third cup of black coffee and chain-smoking. He watched Ann as she crossed to the writing desk. "I'll need the insurance certificate," she murmured.

"You're in a hurry to get off."

"Well, it wouldn't do if I didn't seem anxious to get the car back," she pointed out reasonably.

"I'm not letting you go to the police on your own."

She looked at him in amazement. "If I wanted to go to the police station, Mark, I wouldn't need to wait for this kind of opportunity." But she had little hope that logic would influence him.

"I'm not letting you out of my sight, see?"

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"Well, come with me."

"Exactly what I intend to do."

He went out of the sitting room. Ann found what she needed in the desk, also several brochures of holiday resorts abroad. She flicked them over, sensed, rather than heard Mark stealing up close behind her.

"Let's make it Venice," she said, without turning round. "We could be ready in a couple of days. Would you prefer to fly?"

She turned round and met his eyes. For a second there was an answering flicker of interest in his. Then he turned away.

"Oh, do what you want. I can't be bothered."

Ann drove them to the police station in her Mini. As she started up the short drive to the entrance, she suddenly realized that Mark was hanging back.

"I can't go in there," he mumbled. "All these policemen, asking questions. . .the way they did before."

There was no use starting an argument here, she thought. "I won't be long. Will you wait here?"

"I'll wait."

Inside the police station all was informal and friendly. "Ah, Mrs. Venner," the sergeant said. "We've got Mr. Venner's car in the garage. Now, if I could just have the insurance certificate and the driving license—"

Ann switched on her best smile as she handed over the documents. "I'm sorry to give you all this bother, Sergeant. We thought we'd just push the car out of the way and call for it this morning with a can of petrol. Had no idea it would cause you all this extra work."

"That's all right, Mrs. Venner." He pushed the book toward her and indicated the place for her to sign. "We had a phone message about it early this morning. We had to investigate. Thank you." He restored the book to its position on the desk. "Be a good thing when they bring that level-crossing up to date, with modern signals and warnings and everything."

"Oh, they're starting on that, at last?" Her voice sounded strained.

"Day after tomorrow. Trains are being diverted round Kidstock while the work is being done. Pity they didn't get on with it sooner."

He broke off in embarrassment, as Ann showed signs of agitation. "Oh, sorry, Mrs. Venner. I forgot myself for the moment. . .bringing back such unhappy memories to you."

"Yes, Sergeant, horrible coincidence, wasn't it?"

Ann swung round at the

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sound of Mark's voice. "Leaving our car there, of all places," he muttered.

The sergeant looked at him, puzzled. Ann felt panic rising up in her. "We'll get the car now," she said.

Mark made no move. He looked round slowly. "So this is what a police station looks like. Not so terrible, almost inviting."

"This is just our shop window, sir. As long as you don't have to go past those doors—" The sergeant laughed rather feebly as he pointed in the direction of the doors leading to the cells.

Mark stared straight at Ann. Her outward control was near the breaking point. "I don't think I'd mind it so much," he said quietly. "It would be an end, one could just give up. . ." His voice tailed away and the sergeant could barely have heard the last words.

"Heavens!" Ann, glancing at the clock on the wall, broke into the role of the flurried, busy young woman. "It's nearly eleven o'clock and we've such a lot to do!"

She crossed quickly to Mark, slipped her arm through his, and steered him through the door.

"The garage is round the back, Mrs. Venner," the sergeant called. . .

Two exhausting days later Ann had completed the arrangements for their trip to Venice. Mark had made no objection to going but neither had he helped her. He had spent most of his time just sitting and smoking and brooding.

"We're all ready now," she said. "The packing's finished. I'm tired, Mark. Let's go out to dinner tonight, there's no food in the house."

"I'm not hungry. I don't want to go out and face people."

"All right, we'll have an early night and be fresh for the journey tomorrow." She sat down near him. He looked at her, but his eyes were empty. "We'll be away from all this," she went on, "in a few hours and you'll get well. And it will be like old times, the two of us."

He drew back. "The two of us!" he shouted. "You fool, can't you see it will never be just us two! John won't stay behind, he'll always be with us, no matter where I run to!"

Ann's iron self-control, rigidly maintained for weeks past, suddenly snapped, stretched beyond endurance. "I don't need any reminders!" Her voice was like a whip. "You've made sure of that, with your whining and scenes and suspicions. You've made our life a hell because you haven't the

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guts to see the job through. So you blame me all the time. I've had to carry the burden alone. Where would you be today if it weren't for me!"

"Back in my old life—a million times better off than I am now."

"Then why don't you clear out?" She was trembling with frustration and anger. "You hate me, there's nothing left for us. Why don't you clear out and leave me in peace?"

He was taken aback at this outburst, so different from her reactions in the past.

"I daresay that's what you'd like," he sneered. "But it's not so easy. We can't get away from each other."

"No? Well, I can get away from you. I'm leaving tomorrow morning as planned." She suddenly gave in to her despair. A flood of bitter sobs shook her. "I've stood as much as I can."

He heard her run upstairs and slam the bedroom door. He tried to sort himself out. If he let her go, he'd be rid of her. Perhaps, without her, he'd be able to come to terms with his guilt. But he didn't want her to leave him — it could be dangerous for him. She might decide to go to the police and then how would he know?

He felt confused. He went slowly upstairs and listened at the bedroom door, expecting to hear her crying. He opened the door quietly and went in. She was seated on the edge of the bed, not yet undressed, deep in thought, with set, tired face. As she looked at him, quiet now and subdued, with something of the former Mark Venner looking out of his eyes, her heart turned over. "Mark, darling, forgive me. I'm sorry for what I said just now."

"It was quite true. How were you to know I had a conscience?" He sat down beside her. "Pity I didn't have the nerve to do myself in the other night, not even when I was full of whiskey. That would have solved all my problems, and yours."

The outburst had done her good, she thought; her mind was clear, her patience restored; her longing for him intense. She smiled faintly. "I don't have any problems of my own, I only have your problems. You're eaten up with guilt. I'm not. I've wondered why I'm not, but it's not so easy to explain. I suppose it's too much a matter of emotions and temperament and I can live with it, Mark. John was a bore; he was in the way of our wonderful life together. It was a clever scheme and it worked."

"Clever because you thought of it," he said harshly.

"But it worked because of

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you—your iron nerve and timing. And it's over and done with and nothing can undo it, so why not bury it, Mark?"

"You feel nothing?" he asked slowly. "Nothing?"

She shook her head. "Not even when you began talking about it — the crash — and how it felt. Then my only concern was for you." She held his eyes. "I've only got feelings and thoughts for you, my darling."

"You're the strong one," he said. "I'm the weakling. Look at me."

She shook her head. "I need you, Mark, more than you need me. I'll never leave you, whatever I say."

"You feel nothing, nothing at all for John?" he asked again, wonderingly. "You have no doubts, no remorse, not just a little, now and then?"

"No." The word was emphatic. It was how she felt. She put out her hand to his cheek.

He struck it aside. "Then how can you know how I feel? How can you help me? You're not flesh and blood." He stood up, shaking. "You're right—you're not leaving *me*—I'm leaving *you*!"

He ran downstairs and picked up his suitcase. He had no idea where he would go but he felt, suddenly, that he must drive away, anywhere, and never come back. He felt more alive and alert than he had done for months.

He drove carefully at first, then increased his speed. He felt almost intoxicated, although he had only had a couple of whiskies. He felt fine, in fact. He would go on for another six or seven miles and then turn off, along the road to the level-crossing. He could take that, the way he felt tonight, and then he would be free.

He'd drive along the deserted stretch of road to the crossing, drive straight over it, without hesitation or fear. Tonight he would lay his ghosts—once and for all. He turned into the long straight road that no longer held any terrors for him. In a few minutes the level-crossing would come into sight.

In the far distance behind him a car's headlights streamed into his mirror. He glanced quickly behind, suddenly suspicious. It could be Ann, it was a small car. He slowed down just enough to try to identify it. It looked like Ann's car. So —she was following him. Well, he'd show her. She hadn't a hope of keeping up with his Jaguar.

He glanced at the dashboard clock. 9:55. And suddenly an icy streak cut through him. No, he wouldn't think about it. The level-crossing was coming into

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view but still far enough away for him to pull himself together.

Ann's car was creeping up on him. He'd beat the lot of them, John included. He increased his speed, touching 80 now. 80. That was what he was doing on the night—that night—

The exhilaration was evaporating, yielding to confusion. He drove by instinct, the shrieking sounds so familiar to him in his nightmare blurring his senses. Without turning his head, he slowly reached out with his left hand toward the passenger seat beside him. He felt a man's leg.

Relief flooded over him. As if in a spell, he turned his eyes toward his companion. He fully expected to see John and he was not startled when he met the other man's eyes. He heard him grunt and sink down drowsily into his seat.

He heard the shrill whistle of the oncoming train, its clattering wheels, its relentless din. The car was speeding directly into it.

"John, John!" he yelled. "Jump, for God's sake!"

A few seconds later came the crash and, a few seconds after that Ann's car pulled up. She ran from it like someone demented and found Mark's shattered body in the debris. He was alive, barely conscious. Very gently she lifted his head onto her lap. He stirred.

"Thank heaven," she said. "You're all right."

He spoke with difficulty, but he made it; he had something important to say. "John—I saved him. . .this time. . ."

"Mark, Mark!" Ann was frantically willing him to cling to life. "Hang on, try to hang on for a bit. There was no train, they're going round the other way. You hit the lamps and things."

It took a few seconds for this to sink in. During that last moment before death, his eyes and mind seemed to clear. His words came distinctly. "But I made it right with John—to hell with *you*."

People and police arrived some minutes later. She was still sitting there, hunched over him, desolate, defeated. John's murder had left her unscathed. But Mark had died hating her, and her life was over.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Ponsonby story by

ALAN K. YOUNG

Amos Ponsonby, Professor of English emeritus at Briarwood College, started his post-retirement career as a code-and-cipher expert in a specialized area. But in his most recent case he evolved into a criminologist, unraveling a secret message as a means of solving a murder. Now the old professor travels the whole route: he no longer needs even the springboard of code or cipher to be a full-fledged detective. True, he is drawn into the mystery because of proximity, but once in he is the relentless pursuer of the truth . . .

TRUTH WILL OUT

by ALAN K. YOUNG

In spite of having lived with a telephone for most of his nearly four-score years, Amos Ponsonby had never quite made his peace with that instrument. To his mind the first complete sentence ever spoken over one — Alexander Bell's "Mr. Watson, come here; I want you" — had been prophetic of what was to be its chief role in his own life: to intrude at frequently inopportune moments on an otherwise well-ordered existence. Accordingly, the peal of a phone always struck him as unpleasantly shrill, especially when it shattered the calm of an early Monday morning.

"Yes?" he inquired curtly.

"Professor Ponsonby?" The voice on the other end was small and feminine. "This is Beryl Forman. I hate to bother you like this, but I'm rather worried about Paul. I've been up here at Big Bear Lake this past week and I told Paul I'd call him over the weekend, but I've been trying ever since Saturday morning and I can't seem to reach him. And since you're our nearest neighbor, I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind running over sometime today to see if he's all right? I'm sure he is, but it would ease my mind if I knew for sure."

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"Not at all, Mrs. Forman," replied Ponsonby. "I was just about to sit down to breakfast, but I'll be glad to drop over afterward and give him a piece of your mind."

"Nearest neighbor, is it?" humphed Mrs. Garvey a few moments later, as the plate with Ponsonby's omelet hit the table with more than its usual emphasis. "Only neighbor who'll give her the time of day is what she means, the shameless hussy. Well, you can be sure that lake'll be living up to its name this week, what with her and that roadside gigolo carrying on up there in the altogether. Out at that Restawhile place of his they don't even bother to pull down the shades, so they don't, and there's Martha Boyle's oldest no more'n fifteen and that impressionable, too.

"Poor Martha can't even get her housework done what with standing guard night and day at the upstairs front. Not that that husband of hers hasn't been asking for it, mind you, expecting her to type up them scandalous books of his and not come away with a few ideas of her own. It's a good thing he's not been writing murder stories, so it is, or she'd have done him in long ago."

Ponsonby sighed, and carefully laid down his fork. When faced with Mrs. Garvey's involuted observations on Briarwood's occasional scandals, he often felt much as Thomas Young must have felt on first encountering the Rosetta Stone: what, in God's name, did it mean? He now began, piece by piece, to unravel his housekeeper's most recent revelation, arriving at last at the following translation:

Mrs. Beryl Forman, who lived with her writer-husband next door to Ponsonby down the gently curving slope of Spring Street, was known to "every last soul in Briarwood" to be having an affair with one Jack Clegg, proprietor of a motel on the outskirts of Briarwood known as the Restawhile Lodge. There they frequently met in supposedly clandestine assignations which, in truth, were as well publicized as the affair itself, being carried out in an upstairs bedroom directly across the highway from the residence of one Martha Boyle, incensed and highly voluble mother of three teen-aged girls, whom she was at great pains to keep away from the upstairs front window during one of the Clegg-Forman trysts by the simple expedient of standing guard there herself.

Beryl Forman's husband Paul, moreover, was held by

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the good women of Briarwood to be scarcely less blameworthy in the affair, since he was the author of half a dozen highly popular, highly purple novels that Beryl, who had been his secretary before she became his wife, typed up for him from the tapes on which he habitually dictated them.

"And is Paul Forman aware of this threat to his marriage?" inquired Ponsonby, having sorted out the basic situation to his satisfaction.

"Sure and who's to say?" asked Mrs. Garvey emphatically, and immediately proceeded to do so. "The man would have to be blind not to know she's been up to something, so he would. This is the third time this year she's been up to Big Bear Lake — to visit a girl friend is what she told her daily, and like as not told that poor fool husband of hers, too, when every last soul in Briarwood knows the Restawhile gigolo is up there having his way with her. I shouldn't wonder if that's why she called you — because with her husband not answering the phone she's got to wondering if maybe he's not on his way up there right now to do in the both of them, and who's to blame him if he was?"

Which chilling prospect occupied Ponsonby's mind half an hour later as he strolled down the tree-shaded sidewalk in the direction of the Forman residence. A week of uninterrupted sunshine had finally changed to a froth of dark low-lying clouds and a rumble of distant thunder; the sound rolled up the edge of his thoughts like background music to Mrs. Garvey's disturbing speculation. He had never particularly liked Paul Forman — the man, to his way of thinking, suffered from a self-conceit that was totally unjustified by his appearance, personality, or accomplishments. Yet he scarcely suspected him of being capable of murder.

Beryl Forman, on the other hand, Ponsonby had always rather fancied. He knew that the good ladies of Briarwood considered her, as Mrs. Garvey put it, to be "no better than she should be," but to him she was simply a small dark-haired woman with an air of—what? Frailty? Ingenuousness? Something, at any rate, that always made him want to protect her, quite apart from any knowledge that she was in need of protection.

Ponsonby smiled to himself at his unwarranted gallantry as he proceeded up the Formans' walk. Most of the houses on Spring Street were big Victorians in varying stages of res-

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toration, but in the case of the Formans', bastardization was perhaps more apt a phrase. The original gingerbread had all been stripped away, a once handsome bay window had been turned into a curving glass-brick wall, and a functional study had been attached like a leech to the center of the ground-floor rear.

It was toward the latter that Ponsonby, unable to get any response at the front door, finally directed his steps, for it was there, he knew, that Paul Forman grappled with his salacious muse, sometimes maintaining the struggle, oblivious of all else, for days at a time.

The study was an austere 15-by-20-foot concrete blockhouse with a large skylight set into the center of its slightly sloping roof and an even larger picture window looking out over the elm-shaded rear garden.

As Ponsonby approached it, the rolling, rain-laden clouds seemed to hover just above the roof, turning the morning darker than ever, so that in spite of window and skylight he had to press his forehead against the glass and cup his hands around his eyes to see into the dim interior.

The inside of the study was as austere as the outside. The only furniture was a desk, a desk lamp, and a desk chair in the center of the room and a bookcase against one wall. Except for the skylight and window nothing broke the smooth white expanse of walls and ceiling except a single door opposite the window. For the room where some of the most salacious literature in his experience had been written, it was, Ponsonby thought, curiously like the cell of a monk.

And the monk was dead.

Paul Forman sat slumped over the desk, his head resting on the blotter, his left arm hanging limply down beside the chair, his open eyes staring sightlessly into a shadowed corner of the room.

Twenty minutes later Ponsonby once again stood outside Paul Forman's study window, awaiting the arrival of his old friend, Briarwood's Chief of Police Phineas Decker. Having tried without avail to gain entrance to the house, Ponsonby had hurried home and phoned the station from there.

"Ahhh!" Mrs. Garvey had exclaimed over his shoulder as he had dialed. "So that hussy's done him in, has she? And wasn't I predicting that very thing not thirty minutes ago? Because himself may have had the money, but the gigolo's got the rest of what she's after."

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"Great Scott, woman!" Ponsonby had snorted. "For all we know the man may have suffered a heart attack, and here you've got poor Mrs. Forman practically on the gibbet!"

"It's the seventh sight is what it is," Mrs. Garvey had observed sagely. "My mother had it, God rest her soul, and her mother before her. Why, I can remember my grandmother telling me when I was no taller than a doorknob how the very week she was married she'd seen poor President McKinley shot down at the World's Fair there in Buffalo four whole days before it happened. And what did she get for her pains but my grandfather telling her not to be daft, and she still a bride, mind you!"

Mercifully the desk sergeant at the Briarwood Police Station had then come on the wire and a few moments later Ponsonby had eagerly accepted Chief Decker's request that he return to the Forman residence and keep an eye on the body until the police arrived.

Now he watched the vast blue bulk of his friend bear down on him across the lawn.

"Good morning, Amos," said the Chief as he came up. He gestured toward the window. "In there?"

Ponsonby nodded, and Phineas Decker pushed past him to press his face against the glass.

"Damn!" he muttered, stepping away from the window and casting a baleful glance at the sky where the rolling black clouds, having virtually turned day to night, seemed ready to burst at any moment. "How'd you come to discover him, Amos?"

Briefly Ponsonby described Beryl Forman's phone call of an hour before. As he finished, from around the corner of the house they heard the sound of breaking glass.

"That'll be Ed," said the Chief. "I told him to do whatever he had to do to gain entry." He excused himself and hurried off to join his sergeant, while Ponsonby turned expectantly to face the study window. Above him he could hear the first big raindrops splattering against the leaves of the elms.

He had only a few moments to wait until the door to the study opened and he could see Chief Decker standing there, silhouetted against the light that now burned in the hall beyond.

The Chief stood quietly for a moment, surveying the room. Then he moved slowly through the door, walking with exaggerated care, like a latecomer to church. He crossed to the desk,

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snapped on the lamp, and the sudden cascade of bright fluorescent light fell with cold indifference on the open staring eyes of the late Paul Forman, on the rusty ribbon of blood that had snaked from the corner of his mouth down over his chin, on the photograph of Beryl Forman on the desk beneath his stiff right hand, on the blue-steel revolver that lay on the floor just inches away from the outstretched fingers of his left.

It was shortly after noon the following Friday when Mrs. Garvey, holding herself ramrod-stiff and staring glassy-eyed into space, wordlessly ushered Beryl Forman into Ponsonby's study.

"And how may I be of service to you, my dear?" asked the Professor when Mrs. Garvey had stalked off in the direction of her kitchen, and his condolences had been accepted.

"I'm not quite sure, Professor." The demure, dark-haired woman facing him across the hearth was obviously fighting to maintain her self-control. "I'm not even sure why I've come— no, that's not true. I *do* know why I've come to you. Because I've heard you're a good friend of Chief Decker's and have worked with him on several cases, and I thought perhaps you could find out —that you could ask him—"

"Yes?" prompted Ponsonby gently.

It came in a rush then: "That you could ask him if I'm going to be arrested for Paul's murder! Jack Clegg murdered Paul, Professor, but he's told the police *I* did it, and I'm scared to death they may believe him!"

Ponsonby's surprise registered on his face. "But I'd heard there was a suicide note— rather, a taped suicide message —in your husband's own voice."

"There was, but actually it was a passage from Paul's latest novel. He always composed his novels on tapes for me to type for him, and this suicide note in the book he'd just finished didn't mention any names, so Jack simply rerecorded it, hoping the police would accept it as a taped suicide message from Paul to me. Jack knew I'd recognize it, of course, but he was sure I wouldn't say anything. My God, Professor, he actually thought I'd be glad! Just because we'd joked—or no, that's not the word—*fantasized* once in a while about how we might get rid of Paul and not get caught. But that was *all* it was, Professor, I swear it! A fantasy, a silly game! I never dreamed Jack would take it seriously, or

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do anything so insane!"

"Perhaps you'd best tell me about it from the beginning," suggested Ponsonby.

Beryl Forman studied the rug at her feet; finally she spoke without looking up. "Jack Clegg and I have been having an affair. We were in love. Or at least, he was in love with me, and I—well, I needed him, or thought I did. He made me feel like a woman, made me feel wanted, which is something Paul hasn't done for years.

"In any case, Jack and I had been seeing each other for about a year, and he had become more and more persistent lately about my divorcing Paul so I could marry him. I told him Paul refused to give me a divorce, but he kept pressing me and then last Friday, up at Big Bear Lake, it came to a head.

"Jack wanted the two of us to drive down to Briarwood together, face Paul, and demand he give me up. But I knew what Paul would say, so I simply refused to go. We argued about it all afternoon, alone there in the cottage, and finally I thought I'd talked him out of it. But by then I was so worn out I took a couple of sleeping tablets and went to bed right after dinner.

"Jack left about eight o'clock, I think it was. I remember I was almost drifting off, and I asked him where he was going, and he said just up to the inn to get some cigarettes. But actually he was leaving to drive down here to Briarwood to see Paul. He was going to demand that he give me a divorce, and if Paul refused he was going to kill him and make it look like suicide." She shuddered at the memory.

"And am I to understand that Clegg actually admitted all this to you?" asked Ponsonby.

"Yes, when he got back that night. It was sometime around two o'clock, I think. He woke me up; he was very excited, like a little boy who had done something clever and couldn't wait to tell someone about it. He was sitting on the edge of my bed and he said, 'Darling, you're free,' and when I asked him what he meant he said, 'We don't have to worry about him any more,' and I said, 'What do you mean?' and he said, 'Paul's dead.'

"And then I think I said, 'My God, what happened? Where did you hear that?' and he said he didn't *have* to hear it because he'd been there. He actually thought I'd be pleased!" She broke off, biting her lip to hold back the rush of emotion.

Ponsonby waited for her to regain her composure before he asked, "Then your phone call to

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me on Monday was just a subterfuge?"

"Yes. And I'm terribly sorry to have put you through that, Professor, but I just couldn't bear the thought of Paul's body going undiscovered for another whole week, and I couldn't think of any other way to have him discovered without giving something away.

"Because by then, you see, I'd decided that I'd have to go along with Jack in trying to make it look like a suicide. When he'd first told me what he'd done I'd become hysterical; I'd ranted, I'd raved, I'd told him he was insane, that I never wanted to see him again. But after I'd calmed down I realized I was as much to blame as he was.

"Because in many ways, Professor, Jack is very naive. He's never been married, and he doesn't realize that it's as easy to get a divorce nowadays as it is to say the word. And so I've used his being naive to keep our affair from becoming permanent, by telling him that I couldn't get a divorce without Paul's consent and that I'd asked him and he'd refused. When the truth was that I'd become used to being Mrs. Paul Forman, with a certain degree of celebrity and all those beautiful charge accounts, and I wasn't about to give it up.

"In other words, Professor, it was my lies that led Jack to commit murder, and I felt I just had to do everything I could to get him out of it. Which is why I told the police he'd been with me at the cottage all that evening, and why when they played Paul's tape for me I didn't say anything about it being a passage from his latest novel that I'd typed myself less than a month ago. And now that Jack is trying to pin the murder on me, what chance have I got that the police will believe me if I finally tell them the truth?"

"You're quite certain, then, that Mr. Clegg has accused *you* of murdering your husband?"

"Yes. I don't know all the details, but apparently he told them I drove down here from the lake last Friday afternoon. And since Jack and I were alone at the cottage all that afternoon, he's the only one who can possibly prove I didn't." She paused, shaking her head in disbelief. "Ironic, isn't it? Last week he loved me enough to commit murder for me, and this week he's trying to save himself by sending *me* to prison."

"That does seem to be a rather startling reversal," observed Ponsonby. "How do you account for it?"

She shrugged. "Panic, maybe, when the police began to question him. Or maybe he was af-

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raid *I* would panic if the police began to press me and decided it was the better part of discretion to beat me to it. Or maybe he just never really got over the things I said to him when he first told me what he'd done, like telling him he must be stark raving mad."

"Do you recall any of the details of what he told you?"

She laughed bitterly. "How does a woman forget her lover's description of how he murdered her husband? He left up there about eight and drove straight through to Briarwood; he got here around ten, maybe ten thirty, and left the car in the alley behind our house. When he came through the back yard he saw Paul working in his study, so he went around to the front and let himself in with my key, which he'd taken out of my purse up at the lake.

"He went upstairs to our bedroom and got Paul's revolver out of the drawer beside the bed. He made sure it was loaded, then went downstairs, walked in on Paul, and told him he was going to give him just one more chance to agree to give me a divorce. Paul didn't even know what he was talking about, of course, and he told him to get the hell out or something like that, and then Jack, very calmly according to him, just leaned over and shot Paul in the temple. He was wearing gloves, of course, and he just dropped the gun on the floor beside the body.

"Then he found the tape with the suicide note on it and used Paul's spare recorder to retape just that much on a fresh tape which he left in the recorder on the desk, as though Paul had just dictated it. And then he got my photograph from our bedroom — there's mention of a photograph in the suicide message — and put it there on the desk. Then he took the original tape of the last chapter and the corresponding part of the manuscript, so that it would look as if the book wasn't finished, and he stopped somewhere along the road on his way back up to the lake to burn the manuscript and bury the tape. And when he got to the cottage, about two in the morning, he woke me up and told me all about it and even boasted about how smoothly it had gone."

During the recitation Ponsonby had been frowning thoughtfully at Beryl Forman down the ridge of his steepled fingers. "It *does* seem to have gone very smoothly," he remarked now. "For instance, how did Clegg know where your husband kept his revolver?"

"From those macabre games I mentioned. We'd talk about

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how wonderful it would be if Paul would simply disappear from our lives, and we'd cook up these elaborate schemes of how we could get rid of him and not get caught. And during one of them Jack asked me if Paul had a gun and where he kept it. And another time, just after I'd finished typing Paul's latest novel, I happened to mention there was a suicide note in the last chapter — this man sitting at his desk staring at a picture of his wife who'd left him for another man, and writing this note to her and then shooting himself in the head — and I recalled how it didn't mention anyone by name or contain anything that would identify it as a written note, so that we could retape just that much of Paul's dictation and pass it off as his suicide message to me, since Paul always taped everything anyway. But it was all so casual, Professor. I certainly never dreamed that—that Jack—"

"That what you took to be an idle game and wishful speculation," interrupted Ponsonby, "Clegg was interpreting as deliberate planning." The Professor leaned forward, spearing his visitor with the same relentless eyes that in decades past had pinioned many an errant undergraduate. "Are you being entirely candid with me, Mrs. Forman? Are you absolutely certain these macabre 'games,' as you call them, were not far more akin to deliberate planning sessions than you now care to admit? Because I'll be frank with you, madam, the apparent ease with which Mr. Clegg seems to have committed this crime would be much easier to believe if, indeed, you had planned it together.

"I am referring, for instance, to the remarkable familiarity he appears to have had with your residence—how he knew where to leave his car so that it was not likely to be noticed, how he knew where to find your bedroom and then your husband's study without being overheard, how he knew where to look for the tapes and manuscript of your husband's latest novel, where to find his spare tape recorder. For that matter, how did Clegg even know that there *was* a second recorder—"

"Because he's *lived* there, Professor!" No sooner were the words out of her mouth than Beryl Forman snapped it shut again, as though horrified at their escape. But after a moment she sighed, and continued, "I suppose it will all have to come out sooner or later. But last summer, when Paul was in Italy doing research for his novel, Jack moved in with me. I'm sur-

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prised you didn't know it already. We tried to be circumspect, of course, we came and went by the alley, but we couldn't stay cooped up in that house all the time. At any rate, that's how Jack Clegg knows so much about our house and where things are kept. Because last summer he lived there, using Paul's study, using Paul's closet"—she squared her shoulders and glared defiantly at Ponsonby—"using Paul's bed for two whole months!"

Ponsonby nodded. "So be it. I recommend, madam, that you get in touch at once with your attorney and go with him to the police to tell them everything you've just told me. It will then simply be your word against Clegg's, and I doubt very much if you need fear arrest unless the police have something more to go on. In the meantime, I'll see what I can do to get to the bottom of this unfortunate affair, and I think I can assure you that in the end, truth will out."

But the gaze with which Ponsonby followed Mrs. Forman's small retreating form down his front walk a few minutes later belied the confident tenor of his words.

"So she called on you to rescue her, did she, Amos?" Chief Decker was leaning back in his oversized swivel chair, grinning at Ponsonby across the top of his cluttered desk at Briarwood Police Headquarters.

"She did," replied Ponsonby matter-of-factly.

"And I suppose you promised her you would save her from prison by unmasking the true culprit?"

"I assured Mrs. Forman I would do all in my power to get to the bottom of this unfortunate affair, yes."

"And I suppose by now you've done just that?"

"I'm afraid not, Phineas. As a matter of fact, I'm quite at a loss as to how to establish Mrs. Forman's innocence. But by the same token, I'm equally puzzled as to how you can be so certain she's guilty."

"Actually, Amos, I'm not all that certain. As far as I'm concerned it would be a toss-up between her and Clegg except for one thing — Clegg leveled his charges against her and told me how she'd tried to pass off that fictional suicide note from her husband's latest novel as the real thing, when I first questioned him Tuesday morning. But Mrs. Forman continued until yesterday to swear up and down that neither she nor Clegg had left Big Bear Lake at all last Friday. It wasn't until she learned that Clegg was accusing her that

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she approached you with a different story, and you sent her back here to tell me. So you can hardly blame me for regarding her as my prime suspect."

"Perhaps not. But it seems to me that Mrs. Forman has a perfectly plausible explanation for her not exposing Clegg until she realized he was accusing her."

"You mean because she felt responsible for his thinking she would welcome her husband's death?" Chief Decker nodded. "Sure it's plausible, Amos. And for your information it's the very same reason Clegg gave us for not having contacted the police the minute Mrs. Forman returned to Big Bear Lake and told him what *she'd* done. Because for the past year and a half, according to him, he's been feeding her promises of marriage, since he was sure she'd never get a divorce, and because a little marriage talk, as he put it, was the fastest way to get her into bed."

"The unmitigated scoundrel!" muttered Ponsonby. "He ought to be thrashed!"

Chief Decker shrugged. "Maybe so, Amos. But it seems to me the story rings just as true in his mouth as it does in hers. Clegg says he wrestled with himself all weekend as to whether or not he should go to the police with what he knew, and then Tuesday morning, when he finally faced me across this desk, he decided she'd never get away with it anyway and that he might as well tell me everything."

Ponsonby snorted contemptuously. "Very commendable, I'm sure. But tell me, Phineas, just what were his specific accusations against Mrs. Forman? She didn't know any of the details."

Chief Decker briefly related Jack Clegg's account of the fateful Friday. It was, as it turned out, more or less a mirror image of the story Beryl Forman had told Ponsonby; according to Clegg, however, it was Beryl who had driven from Big Bear Lake to Briarwood and had murdered her husband, retaping his own fictional suicide note to make his death appear to be self-inflicted; and it was she who had then returned to Big Bear Lake to boast to her lover of what she had done, in the mistaken belief that he would rejoice with her in their newfound freedom.

Indeed, there was only one significant difference between their two stories: Clegg claimed that Beryl Forman had driven down to Briarwood on Friday afternoon, leaving the lake about 12:00 and returning at approximately 6:00 p.m.

"Which means this is one case where time isn't a factor,"

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concluded the Chief. "Either one of them would have had ample time to drive down here from Big Bear Lake, commit the murder, arrange the fake suicide scene, and return to the lake within the period they allegedly were gone from up there."

"May I assume, Phineas, that you've made a search for possible witnesses, either to place the innocent party at the lake during the period when he or she supposedly was away, or to place the murderer in transit somewhere between there and Briarwood?"

"You may. We questioned everyone we could locate who was at the lake that Friday, and we also covered every gas station and restaurant in between. But we didn't have any luck."

"And may I also assume, since you haven't mentioned it, that the coroner's report was of no help?"

"None at all," grumbled the Chief. "Forman had been dead more than forty-eight hours when you found him, and since he was very hit-and-miss in his eating habits when he was living alone, we have no way of knowing when he had his last meal. Lump those facts together and the best the coroner can do is to narrow it down to a period from about one p.m. to midnight on Friday, give or take an hour either way. So I'm afraid, Amos, this is one case where you pays your money and you takes your choice—except for the fact that it was Jack Clegg who came clean first, and without any pressure from me."

"Which could mean only that he is a calculating, ruthless individual," observed Ponsonby tartly. "But tell me, Phineas, would it be possible for me to listen to this pseudo-suicide message?"

Chief Decker shrugged. "I don't see why not." He took a reel of tape from a bottom drawer, fitted it into the recorder on his desk, and punched the Play button. A moment later the familiar voice of Paul Forman broke the expectant stillness:

"My darling," it said; "I wish there were some way to spare you the shock of what I am about to do, and the knowledge of why I am doing it. I am not trying to punish you — I know that you have not deliberately fallen out of love with me and into love with someone else, but the fact remains that you have, and so life, for me, is no longer worth living. Please be assured that I am not rushing into this, that it isn't a sudden, irrational compulsion. I am very calm tonight; my mind is clear; I have

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been sitting here since eight o'clock — it's almost midnight now — weighing life and death from all angles, and there's no longer any doubt in my mind it's the latter I prefer. I have your photograph here in front of me and I will be gazing into your eyes when I pull the trigger. They are the one memory in all this world that I want to take with me into eternity. And so goodbye, my love. Forgive me if you can."

Chief Decker reached out and turned off the recorder. "That's all there is," he said.

Ponsonby was staring at him in undisguised amazement. "But that's enough, Phineas! Didn't you hear him? He said, 'It's almost midnight now.' I assumed that because it was a fictional note it would scarcely throw any light on a real-life crime, or I would have asked to hear it before. But I never dreamed it would tell us the identity of the killer!"

Chief Decker held up a warning hand. "Now just a minute, Amos. I think I know what you're getting at, but if you'll think about it a moment you'll see it won't hold water. You're thinking that because the suicide note mentions it being almost midnight, the murderer would have wanted to stage Forman's suicide as close to that time as possible, and so Clegg must be guilty. But remember, whoever killed Forman fully expected the other person to go along with it, so the murderer could be confident that Forman's body wouldn't be found until the following week. And it doesn't take a great deal of medical knowledge to know that a lapse of more than forty-eight hours will make any pathological evidence about time and death highly imprecise."

Ponsonby impatiently waved aside the objection. "That's not what I'm getting at, Phineas. I'm referring to the fact that the suicide staged by the murderer presumably occurred at night, something I hadn't realized until I heard the taped note just now. And that means the killer made a very serious mistake. Consider, Phineas: whoever committed this crime had to be a very cool customer indeed; he or she drove nearly one hundred miles from Big Bear Lake to Briarwood; faced Paul Forman in his study; shot him in cold blood; first located and then rerecorded a particular section of a particular tape; staged Forman's suicide, even to lifting his dead hand so that Mrs. Forman's picture could be placed beneath it; and then drove back to Big Bear, all in just six hours and without leaving behind any trace of his

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identity. And yet the murderer made one grievous error which virtually throws a spotlight on that identity."

"Confound it, Amos, *what* error? And who—?"

"Don't you see, Phineas? The murderer must have heard the fictional suicide note several times on the day of the murder — when he located it on the tape, when he retaped it, and then when he checked to see that he had it right. So he knew that if it was to be accepted as Paul Forman's suicide message, the police would have to believe that Forman had been sitting at his desk at midnight and staring at his wife's photograph as he pulled the trigger. And yet the only light in Forman's study is the lamp on his desk, and when you arrived on the scene Monday morning, Phineas, *that lamp was off — you* turned it on when you first entered the room. Which means that it must have been off when the murderer left, since otherwise it would either have still been burning or the bulb would have burned out."

"But I still don't see—"

"Think about it, Phineas. Jack Clegg is accused of having killed Forman sometime between, roughly, ten p.m. and midnight, which means that the light in the study would have been on when he faced Forman, when he shot him, and when he arranged his fake suicide. The only way we can assume Clegg's guilt, therefore, is to assume that having coolly and efficiently murdered Forman and staged his suicide, listening to the tape several times in the process, he then was stupid enough to reach over next to the corpse and turn off the lamp, and exit in the dark. That is impossible to accept.

"How much more reasonable to believe that Beryl Forman, having slain her husband in the full light of day, with the afternoon sun flooding through both skylight and picture window, could, in spite of her cleverness, still have overlooked the simple but all-important act of turning the lamp *on*!"

"Then you mean—?" sputtered the Chief. "But that means—confound it, Amos, I thought you were here *representing* Mrs. Forman!"

"I," replied Ponsonby haughtily, "am here representing the truth. The rest—the proof—is up to you."

"I suppose they'll be wanting me to come testify at her trial," remarked Mrs. Garvey as she served Ponsonby his dessert several evenings later.

In common with the rest of Briarwood she had talked of lit-

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tle else since Beryl Forman had been arrested for murder.

Ponsonby stared, nonplused, at his housekeeper. "You? Testify at her trial? Whatever for?"

"Well now, didn't I tell you she was the one what done him in the moment I heard he was dead? The seventh sight is what they call it. My mother had it, God rest her soul, and her mother before her. Have I never told you about how the very week she was married, my Grandmother Boyle saw poor President McKinley shot down at the fair in Buffalo a full four days before it happened?"

"Indeed you have, Mrs. Garvey. But I assure you that neither you nor your Grandmother's extraordinary prescience would qualify as evidence in a court of law."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know why not," huffed Mrs. Garvey indignantly. "If they'd listened to my Grandmother, President McKinley would be alive today!"

Mutely Ponsonby began to eat his custard.

"Q"

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"What, exactly, is your occupation, Mrs. Murkett?" Meg asked.

"I just try to help people, dear. That's all. Nothing very mysterious or dreadful about that, is there?"

MRS. MURKETT'S LODGERS

by HELEN HUDSON

It was an odd house with most of its windows tucked up under the roof and a garden that looked as if it had been dumped out of a passing lorry. There was no bell but the door opened before she could lift the heavy brass knocker.

"Come in, dear," Mrs. Murkett said. She was a tiny woman dressed in brown with a pile of dyed brown hair as if she'd been dipped in gravy. A cozy, homey little woman, the girl thought, ready with hot-water bottles and tea and advice—and two kinds of potatoes at dinner.

"You've come about the rooms," Mrs. Murkett said. The estate agent must have phoned, the girl thought.

Mrs. Murkett hung her coat on a clothes tree covered with coats of all kinds that looked as if they'd walked in from the Nineteenth Century: opera capes and military capes and an academic gown. All far too big for Mrs. Murkett.

"I expect you'll be wanting your tea after that long cold

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journey," Mrs. Murkett said, opening the door to the sitting room. It was a small room almost completely filled by a round table holding a huge brass tray and a half dozen chairs drawn up to the table as if permanently ready for a party. The rest of the room was cluttered with photographs and brass: candlesticks and andirons and pots full of ferns and tall tubs with plants growing out of them and urns holding nothing at all. Unless it was somebody's ashes, the girl thought.

"Sit here, dear," Mrs. Murkett said, pointing to the chair on her right. "I like to keep my left side free. No sugar, I believe. But you do take macaroons."

The girl, who had a passion for them, blushed. Mrs. Murkett smiled encouragingly. "Now that we're all tickety poo, you must tell me about America, dear."

The girl opened her mouth and closed it again. It must be my clothes, she thought, though she was wearing standard Anglo-American gear: sweater and skirt and flat-heeled shoes. Unless Mrs. Murkett could hear her thoughts and detect the accent.

"I haven't been in America for ages," Mrs. Murkett went on. "Not since my last trip with Lady Jocelyn. She always takes me with her when she goes. Her mother died there, you know."

The girl put her cup down. Mrs. Murkett, she decided, was definitely odd, staring at her with the dull brown eyes like splashes of gravy. The phone rang but Mrs. Murkett made no move. "That'll be the Bishop of Ely, poor dear, wanting to get through to Sir Thomas More. But we won't let him interrupt us for theological discussions now, will we?"

She tilted her head to the left and sat smiling silently for a moment. Then she looked at Meg. "I expect America's too cold this time of year for your poor dear father," she went on. "Takes the heart right out of you, doesn't it?"

Leave my father out of this, Meg thought savagely. He was lying in a cold bed-and-breakfast place on the other side of town, getting far too excited over Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, with his black suit and black bowler carefully brushed for the day when his heart would realize he was home again and could slow down to its old relaxed pace. "Let's go home, Meg," he had said in New York after his wife died. He hated America. There was no dignity in it. In America he had sat in a cage

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for eight hours a day with the roar of the subways rushing past him, swathed in dank air that smelled of sweat and juicy fruit gum.

In England he had been a porter at Bedford College, Cambridge, dressed formally in a black suit and black bowler. He had walked through quiet courts delivering the mail and important messages, talking to dons and famous professors and undergraduates on their way to Parliament or a peerage. "Good morning, Mr. Tuke," they said. Everyone knew him. And he knew everyone, by name and estate and family lineage. In his free time he copied down the titles of the books in the college and got them out of the public library. He had become an educated man. But in America it didn't matter what he knew as long as he could make change. Or what he wore. He might have been a deaf mute sitting in his underwear taking in and pushing out coins. All because of those church brasses.

"Too bad about the brasses, dear," Mrs. Murkett said.

Meg jumped. "I beg your pardon?"

"Your mother's passion for brasses, dear. She would love it here, wouldn't she?" Mrs. Murkett looked around the room at the huge brass tray and the candlesticks and andirons. "I rather fancy them myself," she said. "So bright. And so durable."

It was true, Meg thought. It was the brasses that had kept her mother in England and the brasses that had finally driven her out. She had come as a young girl just out of high school from the hills of Vermont to nurse poor Aunt Martha dying in Cambridge. And had fallen in love with church brasses, escaping when she could to rub away at knights and ladies with little dogs at their feet. She stayed on and was trapped by the war and a tall young man in a bowler, leaning against the font.

"That's a lovely bit of work you've got there," he said, admiring her raised rump. Extraordinary in such a small person. Powerful arms, too. He imagined her with her sleeves rolled up, rubbing away at his lumbago. "That's the first Master of Bedford you've got there," he said, "Sir Roger de Pugh. 1301-1375."

She looked up, impressed. By the time she discovered he was a porter and not a don, she was too much in love with his long lean body and trim speech to care. For a while she was happy, wandering around Cambridge and cycling out into the

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flat countryside, rubbing vigorously in village churches and listening to William's talk at home — all about lords and Honorables and the young duke who flew to Paris whenever he wanted fresh croissants for breakfast.

But after a while the brasses had disappeared from the churches because of the hordes of American women who came every summer. They were rubbing right down to the stone, the vergers complained, and dousing their cigarettes in the fonts. She got lonely sitting in a four-room cottage in Histon, waiting for William to come home. When he did, his conversation annoyed and bored her. The young duke had gone long ago and she was no longer charmed by the Honorables who arrived in Bentleys and Rolls-Royces while William cycled miles each day on a push bike. His pictures of the Queen and the College Master, hanging over the fireplace, made those of her parents look permanently ashamed.

"He's a great man, the Master," Mr. Tuke would say. "Was even vice-chancellor of the University. But he came by the Porter's Lodge every day just the same. 'Good morning, Mr. Tuke,' he always said."

"It's a miracle you didn't levitate right through the roof."

"I held onto the desk," he said.

He insisted on reading bits out of his library books to her in the evening, always by titled authors such as Lord Byron and Lord Tennyson. She yawned and longed for a telly.

"They're having *Faison Sauté aux Champignons* at High Table tonight," he would say. Not to mention the five other courses, she thought, and the sherry and the wines going round and round at dessert. High Table and low wages, she thought, drinking up more in one night than William made in a month.

"We're having Glazed Peacock *aux* Candied Tail-feathers," she said. "And it's getting cold."

He laughed and sat down to his pork and mash. No pride, she thought angrily. No pride at all. Never a Christmas off since she'd known him and he often worked late into the night, making special deliveries of this and that. As if they couldn't wait till morning, or pick up their mail themselves. They even left their letters for him to stamp. "It isn't decent," she said, scouring the pot.

"What isn't?"

"Licking other men's stamps like that. You might as well lick their boots."

"They're gentlemen," he said.

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"They wouldn't expect it."

"They're snobs," she said. "You should stand up to them." She was always standing up. Even during tea she stood at the kitchen sink doing the washing while he ate.

He put down his knife and fork. He could not understand her. He felt rich just walking about the colleges. He could enjoy the gardens and the fine old buildings like any peer of the realm. It excited him to think that he was walking the same stones as the greatest men of England — Newton had lived in Trinity and Milton in Jesus and Cromwell in Sidney Sussex. He could go on all night while she yawned in his face. She had never heard of any of them. "Lincoln lived in a log cabin," she said. "And he was the biggest of the lot."

The colleges were merely huge stone buildings to her and so dirty, like the county courthouse back home, only colder inside with stern stone figures watching from the walls to make sure she didn't walk on the grass. Even the Halls seemed dark and gloomy with yards of panelling to be polished and plain wooden tables and benches with no backs. Only the chapels interested her, and she went to a different one every Sunday.

But they were a disappointment, too. For the services were all in English and there was no mystery in them. It seemed strange to hear it said straight out like that, as if they were all talking to each other instead of God. She gave it up and spent Sundays polishing the linoleum and washing her hair. Cleanliness being next to godliness, she felt closer to Him that way. She sat before the fire with her wet hair spread on her shoulders and let William rub it dry. Prices went up but William's wages stayed down.

She took a job cleaning offices. But rubbing the brass on doorknobs and knockers and name plates did not satisfy her, even though she could do it standing up. "Let's go home," she said. She didn't want her only daughter talking like a foreigner. In America she could make money selling her rubbings and work in a factory with other girls, eating sandwiches together and discussing movie stars whose faces she knew and whose private lives, far more interesting than dons' or undergraduates', she could follow in detail in the magazines. At home everyone had washing machines and television sets by now. She was tired of the endless succession of gray days and the early morning fog covering the fields like cream in a saucer. And the

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unbroken flatness. She longed for hills she could go up and down...

"She missed the challenge, dear," Mrs. Murkett said, stirring her tea. "Americans are like that. Climbers."

Meg shivered. "Could I see the rooms now, please?" she said.

"Oh, you'll like them, dear," Mrs. Murkett said. "Quite suitable. And so handy."

"Handy to what?"

"Why, the library, dear. Such a nice occupation, I always think. Working in a library. Passing out information to people in need. Rather like me, I should say."

Meg wanted to shout at her. She was dripping all over Meg's skirt. How could she possibly live in the same house with a woman who did not have the decency to stay inside her own life? "What, exactly, *is* your occupation, Mrs. Murkett?" she said.

"I just try to help people, dear. That's all. Nothing very mysterious or dreadful about that, is there? Though there are some who want to make it sound wicked or just plain silly."

Meg went through the motions of looking at the flat. It was distressingly neat and clean and comfortable. And two flights away from Mrs. Murkett's round table. "I'll let you know," she said reaching for her coat from among the old-fashioned cloaks and capes in the hall.

"Gifts from the bereaved," Mrs. Murkett said. "So kind. This one" — she fondled the academic gown — "belonged to a vice-chancellor of the University. A most imposing man. This was his house, you know, when he first came to Cambridge. He's still here but ever so discreet. Indeed, he has never so much as exposed the tip of his toe. Such a privilege to share my little things with him."

Meg opened the door quickly. "I'll let you know," she said again.

"I'll expect you tomorrow," Mrs. Murkett said. "Around seven." And Meg knew that she was right again.

After she left, Mrs. Murkett sat down in her sitting room and smiled. Soon she would have new lodgers in her empty flat, complete with a new spirit, giving her a new scope for her talents. They would drive the others out, the sullen souls who manifested at odd hours whenever the house was empty. Like Gillian Glegg whose parents had been Mrs. Murkett's last tenants. Gillian was their only daughter, a petulant girl, killed in a fire in the Birming-

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ham Arms Hotel along with fifty RAF Cadets.

"What was she doing in Birmingham?" Mr. Glegg said.

"You can ask her yourself," Mrs. Murkett said.

But he never did. For his daughter seemed reluctant to come over, reluctant to leave all those RAF Cadets, no doubt. The Gleggs had been on their way to Birmingham to find out by themselves when their car crashed. Mrs. Glegg had died instantly but Mr. Glegg lingered on. Long enough to accuse Mrs. Murkett. "I *had* to swerve," he said. "She was standing there, right in the middle of the road. What did you want to bring her *there* for?" He glared at Mrs. Murkett with bloodshot eyes before closing them forever.

Since then his daughter had taken to roaming Mrs. Murkett's house, looking for her lost parents. Mrs. Murkett could hear her now, snuffling in the hall on her way up to the empty flat. They're not here, she longed to shout. They left long ago. Which was Gillian's fault after all, wasn't it?

Mrs. Murkett closed her eyes, not caring to remember. And heard the vice-chancellor's step overhead, his slippers slapping the floor. He had never materialized, never even come into her sitting room which had once been his study. As if he resented her being there with her little things on the shelves where his books had been and her round table in the place of his desk. She had hoped for long cozy conversations about Leslie Howard and the Duke of Windsor and the late Cyril Murkett who had passed in Mauritius with his face towards England and his mirror to the wall. She wondered how he had managed the journey, unprepared as he was. He had merely packed his bag for Mauritius. But the vice-chancellor was an arrogant man who refused even to come downstairs.

The Tukes would be different — a timid girl and a dying man and a woman who had enjoyed rubbing. They were certain to cooperate. Mrs. Murkett folded her hands and listened resignedly to the moaning in the hall and the slap of slippers overhead.

"Ever know anyone named Murkett, Dad?" Meg asked as soon as she got home. He was sitting up in bed, reading, with the Queen and the Master looking over his shoulder. He glanced up for a moment.

"No. There's a garage named Murkett but I never had anything to do with them. Never owned a car." He bent his head to Lord Chesterfield again.

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"Dad, listen. Please. It's important."

"What is?"

"That name."

"What name?"

"Murkett."

"Why must we discuss a garage at this time of night?"

"Because it's *her* name, too. And she seems to know all about us."

"Who does?"

"Mrs. Murkett. The woman with the flat."

"Nice flat, is it?"

"Lovely. But she's impossible."

"Well, she won't be living in it, will she?" He began to read again.

"Dad, please."

"I must finish this tonight if you're to take it back tomorrow. Terrible the way they make one gobble up books."

"Dad!"

"Well, then. What's the matter with her?"

"She's peculiar."

"I expect it's change of life. Takes some women that way. Your mother, for instance. Used to get up five times a night to check the stove and douse all the used matches. Had to give up my pipe. Wanted me to take up chewing gum instead. Terrified of fire, she was."

But she had died a terrible death anyway, though not from fire. She had been crushed getting off the Lexington Avenue express one evening, coming to meet him at work. Squeezed to death by the hordes trying to get on and off the train at the same time. Her powerful arms hadn't helped her then. She had been squashed like a paper bag right opposite his window. Nice little rump and all. That was technology and efficiency and progress for you. That was America. "Let's go home, Meg," he had said right after the funeral. . .

Meg avoided Mrs. Murkett as much as possible after they moved in. But one evening Mrs. Murkett stopped her at the stairs. "How's your father, dear?" she said, looking up at Meg with her huge dull eyes.

"As well as can be expected, thanks."

"No, dear. I'm afraid not. He's fretting, you know, poor man. Takes most of us that way near the end, imagining it will be just a great empty place with nothing but air and angels flying around. Perfect strangers staring and playing their harps and waving their bare feet in your face. But, of course, it's not really like that at all. Tell your father I'm here to help whenever he's ready, will you? A very distinguished-looking man, your father. A bishop, I should imagine. Sent back for cheating on the tithes. He'll be

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wanting some assistance when the time comes. So he can have someone ready to welcome him over there. Tell him I'm here to help, won't you, dear?"

Meg nodded vaguely and ran quickly up the stairs. Her father looked up from Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Very comfortable, this place, Meg," he said. "And so quiet. No cars. No people. And the phone hardly ever rings. But odd. The water in the taps, for instance. Starts to gush suddenly for no reason at all."

"Just something in the pipes, Dad."

"And there's something odd about that woman, too." She had been up that afternoon asking him did he want to make contact. "Extraordinary question, wasn't it? I told her there was no one but my cousin in a nursing home in Royston and he had three wives and six children and wouldn't even recognize me. Why should I want to make contact with poor old Ernie?"

"She didn't mean Cousin Ernie, Dad."

"Who then?"

Meg sat down on the bed and took his hand. "She's a medium, Dad."

"Good Lord! I'd rather she was a garage."

But she had admired his picture of the Master with his face laid out like a place setting where no one would ever care to eat. He was clutching the lapels of his gown and looked as if he were about to say something lengthy in Latin.

"Do I detect a faint family resemblance, Mr. Tuke?" Mrs. Murkett had said.

"I hardly think so. That is Sir Herbert Pennyfeather."

"My vice-chancellor," Mrs. Murkett cried.

"My Master," Mr. Tuke said.

"Ah, dear Mr. Tuke. I sensed immediately you were a kindred spirit. That you belonged to this house and its inhabitants. For you realize, of course, that Sir Herbert himself was once a resident here. In fact, he still is. In the rooms he loved."

"I hardly think so, Mrs. Murkett. He is, in fact, in Great St. Mary's. Unless," Mr. Tuke smiled, "he's in the Lodge of Bedford College, sitting down to his five o'clock sherry."

Mrs. Murkett sat up very late that night, unnerved by the sight of the picture. Sir Herbert had never had a face before. Would he materialize now, she wondered, at some awkward time — when she was in her bath or entertaining the vicar? She switched her thoughts to Mrs. Tuke.

The next evening she stopped Meg again. "I'm sorry to have

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to say this, dear, but I can't help feeling that things are not as they should be."

"Oh? My father and I are quite happy here."

"Yes, dear. Why shouldn't you be? But what about the others? That's the point, isn't it? So many of *them* and only two of you. I myself have been hounded to death since you moved in."

"Hounded?"

"By a very persistent, I might say, bullying voice. Someone is trying to get through, dear. And *not*, as your father tried to pretend, some person named Ernest in Royston. I am being subjected to the most frightful nagging, even abuse. And constant interruptions. It is interfering with my work. I am letting them all down as a consequence."

She dropped her voice. "Yesterday she unzipped poor Mr. Dipple's trousers right in the middle of a most important message from Sir Winston. Lady Churchill was that upset. Something must be done."

"What are you suggesting, Mrs. Murkett?"

"You must help me to identify that poor troubled spirit, Miss Tuke, so we can make proper contact. It's no more than common humanity, dear."

Meg sat down on the steps, thinking wildly. "I don't really know, Mrs. Murkett. Unless it's young Raskolnikov. He was always in a terribly overwrought state."

"Sounds foreign, dear."

"He's Russian."

"Oh, I don't think that can be right, dear. Ever since the Revolution they've been afraid to come over. Can't blame them, can you, poor dears?" The phone began to ring. "That'll be the Duchess of Devonshire. She's feeling terribly neglected over there. So many duchesses, after all, not to mention crowned heads. She'll be wanting a booking for tomorrow. Always lets it go too late. And her people have so far to come. The problem of coordination in this profession is perfectly dreadful. I shall have to computerize."

The phone stopped ringing. "Yes, dear, I'm coming," she called. "But I can't possibly fit her in tomorrow. I have a haunting at three." She began to move toward the sitting room. "You be thinking about that voice, won't you, dear?" she called over her right shoulder. "Someone who speaks English. In a *woman's* voice."

Upstairs, Mr. Tuke was lying in bed with a book by Lord Beaconsfield on his chest and his eyes closed. "How are you, Dad?" Meg said. He looked terrible. All this talk of making

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contact was having its effect.

"Been thinking of Nellie," he said, opening his eyes. "I never should have taken her back there, you know. Killed her, didn't it?"

"But she wanted it, Dad."

"Still, I should have been firm. That's always been my trouble, you know. She's as much as told me so many times. I didn't stand up enough, she always said. At the right time. In the right place. For the right reason. Even to *her*. And she should have sat down more. That woman was up here again. She said someone wanted to come over. Your wife, she said. I told her it couldn't be Nellie. Nellie's in America. She would never want to come back here. She hated it here." He closed his eyes. "Besides, she never liked the Master. She'd never move in with *him* here."

"Pay no attention, Dad. She's mad."

"Do you think there could be something in it?" he said. He had opened his eyes again and was staring at her. "Maybe that's Nellie in the bathroom, turning on the taps. She was always one for a good wash, whenever she was bored or upset."

"Forgotten about English drains, Dad? You can't blame *them* on Mother."

He was silent for a moment. "What do you think she wants then? That woman downstairs?"

"Clients, probably. Or someone to polish her brasses."

The next morning Mrs. Murkett met her right outside the door of the flat. "I sensed you might be leaving," she said.

"I'm leaving for work as always, Mrs. Murkett. I'm sorry but I can't stop now."

"Oh, I shan't keep you long. I'm used to being quick. My profession demands it. My spirits hate dawdling. I've got Queen Victoria on the sofa right now. Still looking for Albert, poor dear. I've promised to do my best though it's something entirely new in the field. Something. . ."

"Please don't let me interfere, Mrs. Murkett."

"But you are, dear. That is exactly what you *are* doing. Interfering. Setting up wicked vibrations. My voices have been complaining. They are reluctant to come over."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Murkett."

"I think you do. It is not pleasant to house scoffers and cynics in one's own bosom. Even from ignorance. And that voice is driving us all mad. Interrupting constantly and in such a vulgar accent. And such language! Really, quite shocking."

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"That is certainly *not* my mother," Meg said.

"Right in my sitting room. I cannot tolerate it any longer." She bent her head to the left. "She's coming over now. Really, such vulgarity! Something must be done, Miss Tuke. Immediately!"

Mr. Tuke lay listening to the voices in the hall and thinking about Nellie. He had been getting more worried all week. The library books lay unread beside him and he took more and more sleeping pills to keep from thinking. He didn't like to imagine Nellie wandering around Mrs. Murkett's sitting room, and what was left of her could hardly be more than a sprinkle of dust on the table. And he doubted she would have enough voice left even for a whisper.

It was all nonsense. He was an educated man—if self-educated. A man of reason. It was his *heart* that was weak, not his head. But Mrs. Murkett frightened him. At one time she would have been burned for a witch. Not so long ago she would have been collecting pennies from children at fairs. Now people like her were written up in books and interviewed on television. He had seen a whole section in Heffer's Bookstore labelled OCCULT.

It was all because of the war, he thought, bombing people's minds worse than their cities. After that they could believe anything. Even the smart young undergraduates who never wore gowns any more and looked like the "desert rats" he had seen in American films, men who left civilization to prospect for gold. Perhaps they wouldn't want him to wear his black suit and black bowler any more. Or be Mr. Tuke any more. Just Bill or Pop, as he was called in America.

He fell asleep and dreamed that Nellie was sitting at Mrs. Murkett's round table, waiting for him, with her hair spread over her shoulders and her enormous rubbings spread out in front of her. "They don't want them in America," she was saying through sobs. "They're not big enough for America. But I can't do them any bigger. My arms are too short."

Mr. Tuke got out of bed and stood up for a moment to show Nellie he still could. Then he put on his black porter's suit and his black bowler. Would she recognize him, he wondered. He felt quite fit. Ready to take the mail round the college or Nellie for a punt on the river. For his arms were long, and powerful, too.

He walked slowly out into the hall, feeling weak but ex-

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cited. His heart was beating quickly as it had in the old days when he was hurrying to meet Nellie in some college chapel, hurrying to admire her rump and her rubbings.

He turned the corner of the hall and saw her standing at the top of the stairs with her hair hanging loose and her face shining. She stretched out her arms and he walked into them. And felt himself lifted up, high up, above Mrs. Murkett's house and the courts and gardens of Bedford College and the spires of King's. Up to the magnificent Porter's Lodge with the Head Porter himself waiting to welcome him in. And the Master holding out a hand, ready to say, "Good morning." And to call him Mr. Tuke again.

Mrs. Murkett sat in her sitting room waiting for another prospective lodger. For the third-floor flat was vacant again. Poor Mr. Tuke had passed quite suddenly and with no help from her. And his daughter had moved out right after the funeral. Mrs. Tuke had never come at all. But Mrs. Murkett had the vice-chancellor hanging over her mantel. "You keep it," Miss Tuke had said. "It belongs here." But the house seemed terribly empty just the same.

Mrs. Murkett waited but there was no knock. It grew later and later. She continued to wait and hope. And then the sounds began: Gillian Glegg moaning in the hall on her way upstairs. And, overhead, the vice-chancellor moving restlessly, looking for his lost books. And his missing picture? For tonight he seemed more impatient than usual, like a man at the end of his tether. Suddenly she heard his step on the stair. Tonight, for the first time, he was coming *down*!

"*My Master*," Mr. Tuke had said.

Come to take possession at last.

Suddenly she heard someone at the door. The new lodger, thank God. But no knock came. Just a faint, persistent sound moving closer — from the knocker on the door to the big brass knob in the hall to the kettle in the kitchen; closer and closer — to the andirons and the candlesticks and the trays in the sitting room; rubbing, rubbing, rubbing. She clutched the arms of her chair. Mrs. Tuke had come at last.

"O"

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a *NEW* story about

William Shakespeare, Detective

by J. F. PEIRCE

If this were a true story in which William Shakespeare played the role of a detective (and needless to say, it is not a true story), we could infer that the hundreds of thousands of sleuths who came after the Great Will, in real life and in fiction, learned much from Shakespeare's Sixteenth Century ratiocination. But that is playful logic, which might have amused the Bard; but it is also backward logic, and that is something Shakespeare would not have supported for a moment.

Here, then, is the tale of the murder of a remittance man (circa 1585), surrounded by as motley a crew as ever lived in a London slum—beggars, thieves, leeches, cutpurses, blackmailers, scoundrels, villains all . . .

THE MURDER OF IAN PRIGG; or, A Theft in Name Only

by J. F. PEIRCE

Montague House
London, England

Mr. Ellery Queen
229 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10003

Dear Ellery:

Herewith is the second case in which William Shakespeare, playwright extraordinary, plays detective. As in *The Double Death*

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of Nell Quigley,* the information is transcribed from files in the Middlesex Records Office in Shoreditch. These records give his name as Hamnet Hathaway, the alias he used during most of the so-called seven lost years of his life, when he feared prosecution for poaching at Charlecote, the estate of Sir Thomas Lucy near Stratford. Once the threat of prosecution was lifted, however, he resumed his own name. Therefore, I have chosen to give him his true identity in this story. No doubt you'll be able to deduce which of the Bard's plays it influenced. It's element'ry, my dear Ellery!

THE MURDER OF IAN PRIGG; *or, A Theft in Name Only*

Richard Burbage, the brilliant young Elizabethan actor, entered the Tiring Room of The Theatre, which his father managed, to discover a young man with hooded eyes set in an oval face, writing at a rough deal table. "How can you write in so barren a place, Will?" he asked.

Will Shakespeare put down his quill pen and began to stack the sheets of foolscap in front of him. "A place is only as barren as your imagination, Dick," he answered. "To me, this room can be a bat-fouled cave or a fairy castle, the darkest dungeon or my lady's bedchamber, a bloody battlefield or a woodland bower, the fire pits of Hell or highest Heaven. And I can people it with giants and dwarves, fools and wise men, devils and gods, strumpets and true lovers. Remember that!"

The young actor struck his forehead with the palm of his hand. "What I need to remember," he said, "is why I'm here. Constable Sackbutt has sent me to fetch you. There's been a murder in the old barn that father converted into a tenement, hard-by the playhouse, and since you were of help to him once, he thought that you might be again."

"Who was murdered?" the young playwright asked, rising.

"A fop—Ian Prigg by name. Someone stabbed him. Come! I'll tell you about it on the way."

Shakespeare pushed back his stool and followed the actor out of The Theatre into the bright sunlight, whose warmth overwhelmed him.

*EQMM, December 1973

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"The maid found him," Burbage continued. "She went to straighten his room, knocked on the door, and when there was no answer, let herself in—to discover his body sprawled upon the floor. Whereupon she gave a scream to waken the dead—but Prigg didn't waken."

"What sort of man was he?"

"Strange. *Very* strange!"

"How so?"

"For one thing he was always smiling—as if at some joke he alone knew. For another, his eyes seemed incapable of settling on anything for more than a moment."

"I take it he was poor, since he lived in your father's tenement."

"To the contrary. Though he lived meanly, he was of good family and some means. I've seen him stand round after round of drinks when it wasn't his turn and not refuse money to an obvious scoundrel."

The playwright shook his head as if in disbelief.

Reaching the tenement, the young men pushed past a group gathered near the door. Once inside, they paused to let their eyes adjust to the darkness. The hallway seemed cool and damp after the heat of the sun.

"What creatures were those?" Shakespeare asked.

Burbage laughed. "Vermin that infest this place," he answered. "The faded blonde is Doll Pernickety, possessed by all, but property of none. The dark delight, hiding the beauty of her neck and bosom under a rude scarf, is Antara Moore, wife of a sailor who is said to have smuggled her into the country. Both are barmaids at The Crown of Thorns. And the aged slattern is the drudge who discovered Prigg's body—and Drudge is her name.

"As for the men, they're all beggars—leeches on Prigg's purse. The big man with the huge hands and vacant eyes is Dog. Though he never asks for more than a penny, no man gives him so little—'less he has no more. The rodent-like creature is Ferret, a cutpurse who'd rather steal than beg, though beg he does. And the 'beauty' in rags and tatters with the patched eye, stump of an arm, and pegleg to match is called Penitent, because he confesses to every sin save those he commits—which are legion."

"What was Oliver Tilt, your father's bodyguard, doing in their midst? Has he been set to guard them?"

"Not that I know of. He and Prigg were at sixes and sevens over

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some trull from the Bishopsgate area. They were forever baring their fangs at each other like two curs, but never biting—no doubt for fear of being poisoned. Well, here we are," Burbage said, stopping in front of an open doorway.

Shakespeare stepped past him. The room he entered was small and seemed crowded with its few possessions: an unmade bed, a stool, a washstand, and a small leather trunk. Two suits of fine clothing and a rapier hung from pegs on one whitewashed wall.

Constable Sackbutt, leaning on his great staff, was standing guard over Prigg's body, which lay spread-eagle upon the floor. The dead man's puffy face was twisted awkwardly sideways. His ruddy complexion was accentuated by the angry red of his hair. An ornately-carved dagger handle protruded from his back.

"Thank you for coming," Constable Sackbutt said warmly. "I trust you can help me. You see things from a different viewpoint than I do. Look about you and tell me what you see!"

The playwright dropped to one knee and studied the body, the dagger handle, and the empty scabbard hanging at Prigg's back. "The dagger was Prigg's," he said after a pause.

"How do you know that?" the Constable demanded.

"The design on the handle is the same as that on the scabbard," the playwright answered. "And you're right. It's murder, not suicide."

"Suicide? I'd not even thought of that!" the Constable exclaimed, pulling at his beard, which mirrored the wisp of hair that peaked on his forehead. "How can you tell?"

"From the position of his arms, the closeness of his feet to the wall, the angle of the dagger." Shakespeare lifted the flap of the murdered man's purse hanging from his belt and gave an involuntary whistle at the sight of so much money.

"Prigg received his allowance yesterday," the Constable said. "Except for what he paid Mr. Burbage for his room and board for the coming quarter, it's apparently all there. From letters in his trunk, he appears to have been a remittance man, a younger son whose parents pay him an allowance so long as he remains away from their home, which is in The Lake Country."

"Did he have no money other than his allowance?"

"I think not," Richard Burbage said, speaking from the doorway. "He tried to borrow money from father last week, but father told him to get the money from those who owed him—though how he could manage that, I do not know. You can't

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get ale from an empty barrel. Fortunately, for Prigg, his bed and board were paid up to the end of the quarter."

"Since he still has all his money and possessions," the Constable said, "we can obviously rule out robbery."

Shakespeare shook his head. "You can't rule out either theft or robbery," he said, standing.

"Why not? Everything seems in order."

"Seems! Things aren't always what they seem. Perhaps what was taken was so valuable that the murderer didn't bother with Prigg's other possessions."

"What could be so valuable?"

"A will, a treasure map, a treatise explaining The Universe. For that matter, his money *could have been* the motive. The murderer could have been surprised by Drudge's knock and hidden behind the bed, then fled once she'd gone, not daring to take the time to steal anything."

" 'Tis possible," Constable Sackbutt said, pulling at his beard.

"On the other hand, something could have been stolen that was of value to no one save Prigg or the murderer."

"What could that be?"

"Who can say? A crust of bread could be of greater value to a starving man than an Orient pearl, and its theft could lead to his hanging. Or a dram of liquor might drive a drunkard to murder when gold would not."

"Aye, but Prigg's money would have enabled the starving man to buy bread or the drunkard a barrel of Malmsey."

"A man might steal food or drink or what you will, yet not steal jewels or money. Perhaps Prigg was blackmailing someone. He might have had a letter that revealed its sender to be a spy or an atheist, both capital crimes, or one from a married woman to her lover."

The room had one imperfect glass window, grey with grime, that looked out on The Theatre, and Shakespeare crossed to examine it. "From the dust on this sill," he said, "I'd wager it has been weeks since Drudge disturbed it. You'd think that on so warm a day Prigg would have opened the window."

"He spent little time here except to sleep," the actor said. "And Drudge has done little more than make a pretence of cleaning his room since Prigg accused her of nipping from the bottle of sack he kept in his washstand. Perhaps Prigg caught her taking a nip from the bottle."

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"Perhaps. Many a murder has resulted from less. But my point is that the murderer must have entered by the door, since the window sill is dusty. So Prigg either let him in or he forced his way in when Prigg answered his knock. Did Prigg make no outcry?"

"None has been reported. And everyone heard Drudge when she found the body."

"Then it's probable Prigg knew his attacker, perchance invited him here—or *her*, for that matter. Was he a lecher, a wencher?"

"He would liked to have been," Burbage answered, "but he's never entertained a woman here that I know of. He was too ashamed."

"No doubt Prigg trusted his murderer," the Constable said. "Otherwise he wouldn't have turned his back on the villain."

"How do you know the murderer is a villain?" Shakespeare asked.

"Anyone who'd stab another in the back is bound to be. Not that the fool didn't ask for it, wearing his dagger at his back. For the life of me, I've never understood why a man would wear his dagger thus."

"Perhaps to conceal from anyone approaching that he is armed," the playwright answered.

"God's blood, I never thought of that!"

"Then think of this: how could anyone have gotten behind Prigg to stab him when his feet show that he was standing close to the wall?"

"How indeed?"

"Probably because no one did. No doubt Prigg was struggling with his murderer when the murderer's hand found Prigg's dagger and stabbed him with it. It's even possible that Prigg pushed away from his assailant and impaled himself."

"Could the murderer have stabbed Prigg with his own dagger, then replaced it with Prigg's?" the Constable asked.

"I doubt it. There would have been more bleeding if he had. Besides, there are flecks of white on the butt of Prigg's dagger handle and a spot on the wall where the whitewash has been rubbed."

"God's wound! What would I do without you?"

"What we need do," the playwright continued, "is learn more about Prigg, his private world, and the creatures who inhabited it. Maybe Logic will then tell us the reason for his murder."

"From all reports," Burbage said, "his world consisted of this

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tenement, The Crown of Thorns, the houses near Bishopsgate, and the roads between."

"Then those will be the perimeters of our investigation. We will begin at The Crown of Thorns."

"Why there?" Constable Sackbutt asked.

"Because," Shakespeare answered, "I've a thirst for wine as well as knowledge, and that's the best place to satisfy both."

"Well, go along then, lads. I must wait here for Justice Jennings to set up a Coroner's Jury before I can remove the body. Report back to me what you learn."

"We will if we stay sober," Burbage said and snickered.

At The Crown of Thorns, the playwright was able to pick out everyone who had been in the group outside the tenement except Drudge. Doll and Antara were serving drinks, and beads of perspiration sparkled like jewels on the dark Antara's brow and upper lip. Burbage ordered sack, Shakespeare a penny-pint of Malmsey; then the playwright struck up a conversation with Stone, the barrel-chested host of the tavern.

"You seem interested in Doll and Tara," Stone observed.

"They're like night and day," Shakespeare replied, "though admittedly a star-bright night and a dull-grey day. Tell me, what are they like?"

Stone wiped the bar with a damp rag as he answered. "Doll is stupid and trusting. She won't sell herself for gold—but gives herself freely to every man who promises marriage. Men, learning the key to the lock, use it. But once a man turns that key, he finds naught worth the taking. I would as soon make love to this rag," he said, holding it up, "as to make love to her again. The only one who ever lied *to* her to lie *with* her more than once was Prigg."

"And what did he see in her that the rest of you missed?"

Stone shrugged. "What did she see in him, for that matter? And what did he see in Dog, Ferret, and Penitent? Unless I were contemplating some foul and unspeakable crime, I'd have none of them."

"And Tilt?"

"An ugly piece of business. Of late he's had eyes for none save Tara. But earlier there were bad blood 'twixt him and Prigg over some trollop in Bishopsgate. Once when Prigg passed his table, Tilt took a knife he were using to cut a bit of cheese and tried to cut a piece of Prigg with it. Had it not been for Dog, Tilt might have

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killed Prigg—for Tilt was drunk and ugly. As 'twere, Dog twisted Tilt's arm till he dropped the knife, then picked him up by the neck and shook him as a dog would a rat. All the while, Penitent were beating him with that stump of an arm, which is a proper blunt instrument."

"And Ferret?"

"He appeared to take no part in it—but later Tilt's purse were missing."

"Why does your father employ a scoundrel like Tilt as his bodyguard?" Shakespeare asked, turning to Burbage.

The actor laughed. "You know father. He's always involved in some 'business' or other. And when he gets the better of someone, that individual usually wants father's life for it. At the moment, Peckham and Allen are feuding over the land that The Theatre stands on, and father's caught betwixt and between. But next week he'll need protection from someone else, probably John Brayne, my mother's brother."

Shakespeare nodded towards the table where Dog, Ferret, and Penitent were sitting. "Dick, why don't you mingle with our 'friends' there?" he suggested. "See what you can learn."

Burbage nodded, picked up his bottle, and sauntered off.

Shakespeare let his gaze pass over the room. "You've a strange mixture of customers, Mr. Stone," he said.

"Aye. Half are remittance men, and the rest beggars and thieves who live off them. Each beggar has one or more of the remittance men whom he owns, like so many head of cattle. Prigg were the property of Dog, Ferret, and Penitent."

"Both groups sound particularly unsavoury."

"Aye. But if I had to choose one over t'other, I'd take the thieves and beggars. At least they have something to do—occupations, you might say. The young gents have naught save their allowances. Prigg used his to buy friends, but I'm not sure he succeeded."

"What about Antara?"

"Tara?" Stone said, studying the young woman. "She is friendly but firm with any man who would try to take her measure—which is every man jack here. I've tried myself and will try again. One doesn't give up the game when the prize is worth the winning. But she makes it clear she loves her husband and that no man is *his* measure. I know of no man save her husband who's ever possessed her or even says he has 'cept Prigg. And I and no

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one else believed him, for we've seen far better and far richer men try and fail."

Shakespeare let his gaze caress Antara. She was balancing a heavy tray on one hand and fending off the advances of the men around her with the other. He remembered seeing her twice without a wrap or head covering during the winter, the bitter-sharp knife-edge of the wind carving her clothing to her body. Both times her gaze had been modestly on the ground; but now, as if drawn by his penetrating gaze, her eyes lifted to meet his, only to pass through him as if he were not there. Then she turned and looked at him. For an instant their eyes engaged. Instinctively, she tucked her scarf in tightly at her bosom. Then her glance passed through him again—and he shivered.

"Do you know of anyone who might have murdered Prigg, Mr. Stone?" he asked, returning to the barrel-chested host of the tavern.

"No one save Tara's husband if he heard Prigg's boasting. He's been here but twice and both times started fights with men who no more than looked at her. Fortunately both were bigger than he and could defend themselves. And neither seemed to take offence. They seemed to pity him rather."

"Where is her husband now?"

"Still at sea, I imagine. If he were here, Tara would be happier than she's been of late—'less, of course, there's been some trouble betwixt them."

"Do you get many sailors?"

"Hardly any. Most hang out in Southwark—at the Bankside stews near the Bishop of Winchester's."

Burbage walked up as Stone finished speaking. "Everyone except Tara claims to have seen a stranger near the tenement recently," the actor reported.

"Oh?" Shakespeare said, raising his hooded eyelids. "What did he look like? Could they describe him?"

Burbage laughed. "At first he was tall-short, fat-lean, and fair-dark. But, in the end, all agreed that he was of medium height and build, with reddish hair and complexion."

Shakespeare smiled. "Why, that describes Prigg! They're all lying. The stranger's neither fish nor fowl but good red herring!"

"There's something you obviously don't know," Stone said.

"And what's that?" Shakespeare asked.

"The description also fits Desmond Moore, Tara's husband."

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When Shakespeare and Burbage returned to Prigg's room, they found Justice Jennings, looking like a dyspeptic bulldog, waddling back and forth beside the dead man's body.

The Justice greeted the playwright warmly. "I'm glad Sackbutt had the good sense to seek your assistance," he said. "Tell me, what have you discovered?"

"Very little, Your Honour. The murderer was probably someone Prigg knew, which limits our suspects largely to the inhabitants of this tenement—though the husband of one could be guilty. Where's the good Constable?"

"He has escorted the Jury to The Theatre, where Mr. Burbage has graciously agreed to let me hold Court. I permitted the Jury to view Prigg's body, then sent them ahead to wait until I had the opportunity to speak to you. What do you advise in this matter?"

"That Your Honour send Constable Sackbutt to fetch the suspects, then permit me to reconstruct the murder in dumb show as I envision it happened. Perhaps during this re-creation the murderer will be revealed by some reaction to the pantomime. To be honest, though I believe I know who the murderer is, I have no evidence to prove it."

By the time Constable Sackbutt had gathered the suspects outside The Theatre, the meagre furniture from Prigg's room had been moved to the playhouse and set up, and Shakespeare had collected and instructed his actors. When the Constable reported that all were present, the playwright gave him the order in which they were to be questioned.

Dog was the first to be brought in. He was seated in the gallery, in the midst of the Jury, so that he could view the mute drama and give answers that would be heard by all.

On stage, Burbage, wearing one of Prigg's suits, played the part of the dead man, and another actor, impersonating Dog, went through their performance in dumb show. The actor playing Dog knocked silently at an imaginary door, and Prigg answered it.

In the gallery, Shakespeare questioned the real Dog, timing his questions to the mute actions of the players. "What is your name?" the playwright asked.

"Men call me Dog," the huge man answered.

On stage, the actor protraying Dog stood with his back bent, his hand outstretched as if begging for money. If the real Dog realized who the actor was supposed to be, he showed no sign.

"What is your last name?" Shakespeare asked.

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"Men call me Dog," the suspect repeated.

On stage, Prigg shook his head and pushed Dog back, then tried to shut the door. But Dog straightened angrily, and Prigg took an involuntary step backwards, giving way before the beggar, who stepped into the room and closed the imaginary door behind him.

Shakespeare tried a different tack. "What was your father's name?" he asked.

The man frowned, but whether at the question or what was taking place on stage it was impossible to conjecture. "Papa," he answered finally.

At first there was puzzlement on the faces of the Jury. Then when they realized the import of his answer, there was general laughter, and Dog looked about him dumbly. Each time his gaze lingered on a man's face, that man's laughter broke abruptly and he looked away in fear or embarrassment.

On stage, Dog again held out his hand, and Prigg shook his head in desperation.

"Where were you born?" Shakespeare asked.

"I don't know," Dog replied.

"Have you always lived in Shoreditch?"

The man frowned. "I don't remember."

"Did you know Prigg?"

Dog's frown changed to a smile. Then his face crumpled. "Prigg were my friend," he said.

"Why was he your friend?"

"He gave me money."

"Did he give you money to-day?"

"No."

On stage, Prigg reached for his dagger and Dog grabbed him up in a bear hug, lifting him off his feet. For a moment Prigg struggled helplessly, then went limp. When Dog released him, he fell to the floor, the dagger handle protruding from his back. There was a ghost-like quality to the actors' movements as they glided silently through the stage business that the young playwright had outlined to them, following his instructions to the letter. Burbage especially dotted all the i's and crossed all the t's of Shakespeare's instructions, his performance foreshadowing the magic for which he was to become justly famous.

"Why didn't Prigg give you money?" Shakespeare asked.

"Because he were dead—like him there," Dog said, pointing to the body now lying spread-eagle.

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On stage, Drudge, carrying a broom and dust rag, knocked silently on the imaginary door. Dog, standing over Prigg's body, looked about helplessly, then hid behind the bed as Drudge opened the door and entered.

"Did you kill Prigg?" the playwright asked.

Engrossed in the drama taking place before him, Dog did not answer.

Seeing Prigg's body sprawled upon the floor, Drudge uttered a silent scream and threw her broom and dust rag from her as she fled, followed moments later by Prigg's murderer.

"Did you kill Prigg?" Shakespeare demanded.

Dog shook his head. "He were my friend," he said, and tears lighted the corners of his empty eyes. Shakespeare nodded, and Constable Sackbutt took the man by the hand and led him away.

"Well," Justice Jennings said, "do you think he did it?"

Shakespeare shook his head. "No, Your Honour. He is a big man with huge hands. He would have used his hands, not a dagger."

"Who is to be questioned next?" the Justice asked.

"Ferret, Your Honour."

As if on cue, Constable Sackbutt ushered the suspect in, and the mute drama began once again. There were few changes in the action. The actor playing Ferret, following Shakespeare's instructions, turned more vicious than Dog when refused money. The stabbing was deliberate, not accidental. And Ferret was in the act of removing something from Prigg's trunk when Drudge knocked. But in the end, as before, Drudge fled silently screaming from the room and the murderer followed after her.

"What is your name?" Shakespeare asked.

"Ferret."

"Your real name."

The little man hesitated, then answered, "Pew. Silvester Pew."

There was general laughter, silenced by a growl from the Justice.

"Where are you from?"

"Lon'on."

Shakespeare frowned. "Not from your accent, you aren't! Where were you born?"

Ferret looked everywhere as if seeking escape. "Bowness-on-Windemere," he at last answered.

"That's in The Lake Country. Did you know Prigg there?"

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"No."

"How well did you know him here?"

"Well enough to borrow money."

"Not beg?"

"I said, 'borrow'!"

"Then you'll wish to pay his estate what you owe him."

Again there was laughter, dissipated by another growl.

"I paid what I owed him."

"You've proof that you did?"

"As much as you that I didn't!" Ferret said, sneering in victory.

"Did you kill Prigg?"

"Not bloody likely!"

"Do you know who did?"

"No!" the little man said viciously. "But when I find out, the villain will pay for what he cost me!"

Shakespeare nodded, and the Constable led Ferret away.

Shakespeare turned to the Justice. "I wouldn't stake my life on it, Your Honour, but, except for repaying the money, I believe he's telling the truth."

Justice Jennings nodded, setting his jowls aquiver.

Moments later, Constable Sackbutt returned with Penitent, the Constable's staff and the beggar's pegleg beating a rhythmic tattoo upon the wood floor. And once they were seated, the dumb show began again. This time the murderer attacked Prigg with the stump of his arm, using it as a club, and Prigg stabbed himself accidentally when he was knocked against the wall.

Penitent recognised himself, for he stared at the scene taking place on stage, unblinkingly, with his one good eye. The playwright elicited little information from him. When he asked Penitent if he had killed Prigg, Penitent pointed the stump of his arm at him menacingly and said, "I won't say I liked Prigg, but I'm sorry he's dead. While he lived, I felt there was someone *I* could feel sorry for, that *I* was better than at least *one* man. Do you know what I mean?" he asked, his voice breaking.

"Yes, I believe I do," Shakespeare said, then nodded to Constable Sackbutt to take him away.

The Jury was strangely silent as they waited for the Constable's return. When he brought in Tilt, the pantomime began again. Tilt recognised himself immediately and jumped to his feet.

"What kind of jiggery-pokery is this?" he demanded. "What ere ye tryin' ter do—trick me?"

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"Is it possible?" Shakespeare asked, throwing his hands palms upwards in pretended surprise.

Tilt's sneer was his answer.

As the pantomime progressed, Tilt's manner became increasingly venomous, till at last Prigg lay dead upon the floor.

"Did you kill him?" Shakespeare demanded.

"No! But I'll shake ther hand of ther man wot did! Prigg were a whoreson villain! A bloody, bawdy—"

"Enough!" Justice Jennings shouted. "Take him away!"

"Do you think he did it?" the Justice asked, once he had himself under control.

The playwright shrugged. "He's capable of it, Your Honour."

Justice Jennings nodded.

There was a shrill clamour of women's voices, and everyone turned as Constable Sackbutt appeared, shepherding the women before him with his long staff. "They refused to be separated, Your Honour," he protested. "There was naught to do but bring all of them together."

"Very well, Constable," the Justice said, smiling at the old man's discomfiture. "Tell them to sit and be quiet."

On stage, there was confusion as to which boy actor was to play the murderer's part, since all the women present were watching. And when the pantomime finally began, it was not clear to the viewers as to which of the women knocked at Prigg's door, for she was dressed too finely and obviously upset. From her gestures, it was difficult to tell whether she was begging for money, threatening Prigg, or suggesting a romp upon his rumpled bed.

Prigg's actions, however, left no room for question. He gestured towards the bed and, when his invitation was refused, tried to force her onto it. But she pushed him away contemptuously. And in anger he seized her by the throat and began to choke her.

The woman resisted with all the strength of her virtue, but Prigg's anger and lust were too strong for her.

Suddenly, the woman went limp. And Prigg had to release his hold upon her throat and grab her about the waist to keep himself from being pulled down by the dead weight of her body. And as he did, the woman threw her arms about him—and, as if by accident, her right hand found his dagger.

In surprise, Prigg jerked backwards, and the naked blade penetrated his body.

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All the women reacted to the scene with little cries and gestures, but there was no question as to which one was reliving a nightmare moment from her own life—for anger, hatred, and loathing came and went quickly upon her face. Her eyes seemed to be witnessing a double image of the scene taking place on the stage before her. And in the end, as her body tensed and her hands found her throat, those watching sensed that she once again was struggling in Prigg's grasp—that *her* hands were *his.*

Then, as Drudge raised her hand to knock upon the imaginary door, Justice Jennings shouted, "Enough! Enough!" Turning to the woman, he demanded, "Well, wench, what do you have to say in your defence?"

Though she spoke softly, the young woman's answer was heard clearly in the surrounding silence. "When Prigg could not buy me with gold, as he did the women of Bishopsgate," she said, her dark eyes still staring at that scene from the past, "or with false promises, as he did Doll, he tried to destroy me with lies—not knowing that my husband, in a jealous rage, would kill him for it and hang for—*nothing!*" She threw up her hands helplessly.

"Why did you go to his room, then?" Justice Jennings demanded. "That, to me, is the crux of the matter."

Antara spread her arms wide, her hands palms upwards. "To plead with him to take back his lies before it was too late," she said. "But," she added, gesturing towards the stage, "you saw what happened."

"That was make-believe!" the Justice thundered. "How do we know you did not submit to him willingly, then stab him when he refused to pay for your services—or that you threatened to tell your husband if you did not become his mistress? Unless you can prove what you say, you'll pay with your life for his murder."

Shakespeare stepped forward until he stood in front of the accused, then held up his hand commandingly. "If I be not mistaken, Your Honour," he said, "this young woman carries her proof upon her person." With that, he snatched the rough scarf from Antara's throat, revealing the angry marks left there by Prigg's fingers.

"God's death!" the Justice exclaimed. "You continue to amaze me. How could you know this?"

Shakespeare shrugged, as if to dismiss his accomplishment. "I deserve little credit, Your Honor. I have seen this woman twice in bitter-cold winter without either wrap or head covering—so why

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would she wear a scarf on so warm a day unless to hide some shame she did not wish the world to see?"

"Not shame but virtue!" Justice Jennings said. "Young woman, you wear the proof of your honour like a necklace round your throat. I hereby instruct the Jury to find you Not Guilty by reason of self-defence!"

Constable Sackbutt tugged at his beard. " 'Pon my soul," he said, "I thought all the while that something had been stolen."

"Something was," Shakespeare answered. "Remember I told you something could have been stolen that was of value only to Prigg or to the murderer? Well, Prigg stole her reputation, her good name. He who like Ferret steals my purse, steals trash. But he who steals my good name, enriches not himself and leaves me poor indeed."

Later, after the others had gone, Antara turned to the playwright. "Had I not a husband whom I love more than life," she said, "I would reward you with that which you wish, for I have felt your gaze devour my body. But as it is, you will have to content yourself with my thanks."

Shakespeare shrugged. " 'Tis not the answer I'd hoped for," he said, "but it will have to do. No, by Venus! It will not! For I *will* possess you—if only in imagination, in poetry, in dreams!"

"If you do," the dark girl said, her voice soft, yet with a cutting edge sharp as any diamond, "do not breathe my name, or I will kill you as 'accidentally' as I killed Prigg!"

Her inflection gave the lie to the word "accidentally," and William Shakespeare shivered.

Finis

Well, Ellery, did Shakespeare, because of Tara's threat, transform the jealous Desmond Moore into the tragic Moor, Othello, and Prigg into the villainous Iago, who provoked him to a jealous rage in which he strangled fair Desdemona? And though Shakespeare changed Tara from dark to fair in *Othello* was she, nonetheless, "the dark lady of the sonnets"? Despite the recent book of conjecture by Professor Rowse, I'd bet on it!

With warmest personal regards,
Frank

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 406th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story that has a semidocumentary tone, that reads like a blend of fact and fiction . . .

The author, Jonathan Kirsch, was 23 when he submitted his first story, and was working as an Assistant Editor for "Home Magazine," a color periodical that accompanies the "Los Angeles Sunday Times." He has also contributed to the "L.A. Times" book-review section, has had nonfiction articles published, and has ghostwritten two college textbooks, one on statistics, the other on design.

At night he has been attending the Loyola University College of Law, and now, between his job on the "Times," his freelance nonfiction writing, and his law studies, he has "precious little time for hobbies." Nevertheless, he manages to "enjoy target shooting and architectural photography." He assures us that the point of California law in his story is accurate. It is an interesting detective-story point, and we are amazed that Erle Stanley Gardner never used it!

THE NIGHT OF THE STORM

by JONATHAN KIRSCH

Justin Pope, member of the San Francisco Bar and a gentleman of the old style, kept an old-fashioned brass gas-jet in his study in order to light his cigars. He enjoyed fine cigars imported from a tobacconist in Zurich, rare wines from France, and old brandy from London.

But it was not always so. Once, like me, Justin Pope had been an impoverished student who valued a free meal above all other fortunes. He studied the law, and I prepared for the less lucrative calling of a history teacher. He prospered in the practice of law, while I pursued my humble work.

He moved to San Francisco, leaving his college friends behind. Then, after many years had passed, I heard that Justin

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had met with consistently good luck and retired to the leisurely life to which he had been fated from the beginning.

I found myself in San Francisco for a meeting of history professors, and on impulse I called my old friend. At first he was hesitant to see me. Positively cold, in fact. But then he agreed to have me over for a drink and a short visit.

His home was evidence of his good fortune. It was a rambling mansion in a grove of trees overlooking San Francisco Bay. This was 1939, before the war turned so many luxuries into memories, and Justin had a good stock of wines and cigars, both of which we sampled as we sat in his wood-paneled library.

At first the conversation was stilted and formal. But soon I noticed that the rather intemperate amount of wine was beginning to affect him. Justin grew more relaxed, more expansive, friendlier. Clearly he was drunk, and he was drinking in a way that hides a deep problem. I probed gently to discover what curse had come with the money, but he resisted.

Instead he insisted on telling me a story. To tell the truth, the atmosphere of gentlemanly comfort and relaxation had mellowed my curiosity. So I settled back in my deep leather chair, a glass of wine and a cigar in my hands, and I listened to my old friend.

"Imagine, if you will, a stormy summer's night along the rocky coast north of San Francisco. It is nearly midnight on August 15, 1923, and yet a light burns in the sunroom of the Luther Madison mansion, a white Victorian house perched above the crashing surf.

"Luther Madison, the man who built a substantial fortune soon after the California Gold Rush, is unconscious, a victim of pneumonia and advancing years. He was almost seventy years old on that night in 1923. In order to speed his recovery the old man's hospital bed had been moved into the sunroom, a sterile white room surrounded by large windows with a commanding view of the surf below. During the daylight hours it was bright and sunlit.

"But on that night a fierce storm was blowing in off the Pacific. The wind was pounding the windows, rattling them, and shaking the house to its foundations. The large windows were securely latched and the old man was covered with heavy woolen blankets.

"At 11:00 p.m. the evening nurse prepared to go off duty. Her relief nurse was late, owing to the bad storm, and so the evening nurse waited anxiously in the entry. At 11:30 the

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relief nurse finally arrived; the two women talked briefly, discussing the condition of the patient, and then the evening nurse left.

"Instead of visiting the sickroom immediately, where the comatose patient demanded almost constant attention, the nurse lingered in the downstairs kitchen over a cup of coffee. It was warm and pleasant in the kitchen, and the cook, an attractive man, was flirting with her.

"While they chatted, a door slammed somewhere upstairs. The nurse peeked around the door of the kitchen, then shrugged at the cook. 'It's just one of *them*,' she said.

"*They* were the other two occupants of the drafty old Madison mansion — Luther Madison, Jr., the old man's son by his first marriage, and Alice Johnson Madison, his young wife of barely three months. Since the elder Madison became ill, each had stayed in a separate wing of the house. There was no love lost between young Madison — they called him Luke — and his stepmother, a girl only two years older than Luke.

"When the night nurse at last climbed the seemingly endless staircase it was almost 12:30 a.m., the early morning hours of August 16. She opened the door to the sunroom and her eyes grew wide with fright.

"The bay windows of the sunroom were wide-open, and a frigid wind howled through the room. Gusts of wind carried in great floods of rain, which now lay in puddles at the foot of each tall window. The light wicker furniture was blown about like doll's furniture, and bottles of medicine were shattered on the floor.

"The wind had blown the woolen blankets from the old man's body. When the nurse finally turned to the patient after closing the windows, she was horrified to see a ghostly white figure, slightly blue around the lips. Old man Madison was icy to the touch. The extreme elements had worked a murder on the man.

"Police were summoned to the house. There were only two suspects who had the opportunity to slip into the sickroom, unlatch the windows, and allow the old man to die. Perhaps it was Luke Madison, or perhaps is was Luke's stepmother, Alice Madison, the girl who had once worked in the lingerie department of the large department store on which the Madison fortune was built, the young girl who had persuaded the old man to marry her after a brief flirtation.

"The period of opportunity for

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the killer was between 11:30, when the evening nurse left, and 12:30, when the night nurse found him dead. Either Alice or Luke could easily have slipped into the room. Even a few minutes' exposure to the freezing wind of the storm would have been sufficient to kill Luther Madison, but the icy temperatures in the room prevented the coroner from placing the time of death more precisely than between 11:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m."

"And what was the motive?"

"Alice, a simple girl but possessed of a native cleverness, had persuaded the old man to tear up his will and sign his entire fortune, estimated at five million dollars, into community property, which meant she was entitled to half. The old man, however, was now intending to make a new will — he had made an appointment with his lawyer — but had fallen ill and slipped into a coma before the new will could be drafted and signed.

"Luke was an unworthy son for such an industrious man as his father. He had made a half-hearted effort at learning the family business, but failed utterly. He had dropped out of a half dozen colleges. He was a ne'er-do-well, living on the meager allowance his father grudgingly doled out to him. He had managed to run up huge gambling debts and was desperately in need of money."

"But there was no new will?"

"No," Justin said with a smile. "And that fact supplied the motive."

"How?"

"During a routine police investigation of the Madison house a certain newspaper was found in the son's room. It was a legal newspaper, the kind lawyers consult for the latest rulings and decisions. This alone was suspicious. Why should such a periodical be found in the room of Luke Madison, no lawyer himself?

"The answer was brought to light only after a careful examination of the newspaper. A small item on the last page was circled in red ink. At midnight on August 15 a new piece of legislation was to go into effect in the state of California.

"According to the law as it stood before midnight on August 15, the estate of a man dying without a will would be divided. His widow would get half and his other heirs — his children, say — would get the other half.

"But at midnight a new law provided that the fortune of a man who died without a will would go entirely to his widow."

"And so?" I asked.

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"If Luther Madison died before midnight, his son would inherit two and a half million dollars. If he died after midnight, the whole five million would go to Alice, and Luke would remain penniless."

"In other words," I said slowly, "the son had a motive before midnight and his wife had a motive after midnight?"

"Precisely."

"And so, because of the legal newspaper in the son's room, the evidence pointed to Luke Madison as the murderer?"

"Clearly. And it went to trial. The night nurse testified that she had heard a door slam sometime before midnight, while she was still in the kitchen. She looked upstairs to see what the commotion was about."

"And what did she see?"

"She said she couldn't be sure, but it looked as if Luke was leaving the sickroom."

"And the jury believed her and found Luke guilty of murdering his father?"

"Exactly. He went to the gas chamber at San Quentin. Alice Madison sold the house, inherited the entire fortune, and remarried."

"One thing puzzles me," I said to Justin. "Why would the son have a legal newspaper in his room? I understood from your story that Luke Madison was a playboy, am I correct?"

"Quite correct."

"You know, Justin, an idea has just entered my head. Suppose the wife, Alice Madison, learned that the old man intended to leave half of his fortune to his son after all. Suppose the old man's lawyer had told her so. His lawyer would have known the significance of the night of August 15-16, 1923. How simple for the two of them, the lawyer and the wife, to conspire to eliminate the old man, implicate the son by leaving the legal journal in his room, and then split the fortune between them."

"How simple indeed," Justin mumbled, his eyes half closed.

At that point in our conversation Justin's wife entered the library. She was a gracious and attractive woman in her forties, wearing a long brocade gown and a spectacular diamond bracelet.

Justin stood and reached for her hand.

"May I present my wife?" he said. "My dear, I'd like you to meet an old college friend of mine, Mr. Koenig."

"My pleasure, Mrs. Pope," I said, standing and extending my hand.

"But why all the formality, Mr. Koenig? You must call me by my first name," the charming woman said. "You must call me Alice."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 407th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . What impressed us most about this first story were the subtle touches that established a feeling for characterization, especially that of the first narrator . . .

The author, M. Frances Davis, was "born in a house that now reposes beneath the waters of Lake Cumberland in Kentucky." She has lived mostly in Ohio's lush Miami Valley where she "now shares a Champaign County farmhouse with her husband, two sons, and assorted pets." Mrs. Davis has been a teacher, a Government clerk, and a radio copywriter. She is an "incorrigible bookworm" and enjoys painting, music, and travel. And by the way, she is a grandmother . . .

THE THICKER THE STEW

by M. FRANCES DAVIS

There now. That should do it. I know exactly how I shall rid the world of that smirking Enid. The wages of sin and all that. Anyone with half an eye can see what's going on between my sister Enid and Blair Cunningham, with her husband just buried, and his poor little wife Beth lying there with that terminal disease. Not that I have actually caught them at anything, you understand, or that Blair is to blame; but it is perfectly obvious in the disgusting way they look at each other, and the way they are always making excuses to be together.

Just this afternoon he called from his office and asked if she would run over and read to Beth while her nurse went out to shop. I would have been only too happy to do it myself. But he doesn't seem to welcome my help much any more, not since my precious sister came back to Cherry Hill. And after all I have done for them since poor Beth took ill. As everyone knows, I have always tried to do my Christian duty. Enid really should not be running

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around so much anyway, in her condition.

In a way it is rather regrettable about Enid's pregnancy. But considering what the father was, you might say I am doing society a favor. One less of them won't be missed.

The time has come when I will have to move quickly. What Enid told me last night makes it imperative. I asked her why she had waited nine years to say anything, and she replied that she had not been able to face the family with such disgrace; but she had finally decided that not disclosing it would be even more disgraceful. As for telling the police, the little fool seems to think I should and would tell them myself.

We had just filled the dishwasher, and I was at the sink cleaning a quart of fresh strawberries for today's lunch. I don't hire any help now, except a woman who comes in Fridays. You have to follow them all over the house to get anything done right, and then they rob you blind.

Enid was sitting on the high stool by the freezer, knitting a yellow sweater, size six months. I could tell she was nervous about something. She always picks up a handicraft project when she is on edge.

"I know what really happened to mother and daddy," she said. It was almost a whisper, but I heard.

The bowl of strawberries nearly fell from my hands, but I managed to turn to her with a weak smile.

"What do you mean?" was all I could blurt out.

It seems that our dear Enid was yakking on the phone with mother when it happened. Daddy and mother had just opened the cottage on Bear Lake for the summer. Enid was in California taking her final exams, and I was supposedly right here in Cherry Hill, closing the house before joining daddy and mother at the lake.

Enid heard mother say that daddy had just finished putting up the screens and was on the porch, dozing in a lounge chair. Mother, looking out the window as she talked, saw a strange car pulling up by the stack of firewood. There was a private drive running about a mile off the main road, and the cottage was so secluded that you couldn't even see it from the lake.

"Whose car—why, it's Marcella!" exclaimed mother. "Whatever is she—" Then, Enid recalled, mother was screaming, "She shot your father!" After that, confused noises came over the wire—scrambling, slamming, banging, then a

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silence followed by the click of the receiver.

My one mistake, of course, was neglecting to find out who was on the other end of the line before replacing the dangling receiver. I just hung it up and never gave it another thought until now. Then with gloved hands I put the gun, daddy's own, into his hand, and scurried back to my rented car.

Forty minutes later I was home. My neighbors, seeing my own car in my driveway, blankets airing on the clothesline, and windows wide-open, would have sworn I was right here all the time—that is, if anyone had asked. But no one did. That stupid sheriff up at the lake poked around a little and concluded that it was a murder-suicide pact for reasons of ill health. I don't see why Enid should think such a conclusion is less disgraceful than what really happened.

Right from the start I have been convinced that the best way to get rid of Enid is to fake an accident. The less they bother with an investigation, the better, and accidents do happen all the time. Suicide is out. No one who knows Enid would believe it. She has what they call an outgoing personality. I just call it scatterbrained. Be that as it may, she never broods over things. She is not an introspective person like me.

It has to be something around the house. Tampering with her car is no good. For one thing, it could result only in injury, not certain finality. Besides, my forte is decidedly not automotive viscera. As for riding with her and grabbing the wheel or something like that, I have no intention of risking my own skin. I'm not crazy.

It is surprising how many ideas can be gleaned from the newspapers. Almost any accident can be rigged by an ingenious person. Just the other day I read of a man who was electrocuted when a portable radio fell into his bathtub. I could probably do something like that by going into the bathroom on some pretext while she's bathing and drop the radio in myself. The drawback, though, is that I have noplace to put a radio where it can fall directly into the tub. If time were not of the essence now, I could have a new shelf installed for the occasion.

A boating or swimming accident is impossible, too. She simply will not go near the water at this stage of her pregnancy. Besides, she has been battling a water phobia ever since that silly incident when we were children. I think it was right after my ninth birthday, so she must have been eleven,

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but I was always the stronger. I wasn't really going to drown her. I just had a funny urge at the time to see how long I could hold her head under the water. Mother called to us and I never did find out.

Sometimes in a mystery story the victim is thrown from a horse. Enid does like to ride, but I don't. I just do not care to be around smelly animals, and they don't exactly take to me. So the stables are empty now.

What, then, is lethal around the house? One thinks of potions and pills. But I must be very careful not to arouse the suspicions of anyone as sharp as Dr. Bellman, who is watching Enid's progress with an eagle eye. She is in disgustingly good health, notwithstanding the traumatic experience of having Siggy die so suddenly during her third month. You'd think she'd at least have morning sickness. After all, she's nearly 30, and this is her first baby in eight years of marriage.

One thinks, too, of such perils as balconies, stairs, and loose railings. But this house is the epitome of safety. I am especially proud of my beautiful new stairway. I designed it myself. You don't just walk down; you float down on golden waves of carpet over broad satiny white steps.

Enid has no occasion to go upstairs anyway. I had urged her to use her lovely old room, which I had done over in mauve and pale green, but she insisted on daddy's cramped little first-floor den, saying she felt more at home there since it was the only room I hadn't changed. Now it's just as well. It will serve my purpose much better. She says she may use her old room for a nursery after the baby comes. Ha, ha. After.

She always was the lucky one, just because the good looks fell her way. But I must say that I dress with impeccable taste, which is more than I can say for her. She thinks her calf eyes and her hair like pulled taffy permit her to get away with anything.

Mother used to have those picture-hat-Sunday-paper garden parties when they were fashionable. I remember at one of them I was hiding under the grape arbor, hoping to overhear some interesting adult conversation. Uncle Edgar was sitting less than a yard from me, trading gossip with that old magpie, Wilma Heatherly. Wilma had been married to a Grosse Pointe bank account, and you can believe she let everyone know it whenever she came slumming back to Lansing. Honestly, I think it's ridiculous to see a woman past 40 tearing

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around in a pink convertible.

Anyway, I heard Wilma's nasal voice twanging. "You know, Sally Loxley is so cute, it's a shame both her girls don't look like her. Of course, Enid is a little rosebud, the very picture of her mother. But that younger one—what's her name? Oh, yes, Marcella. There's a look in that child's eyes that makes my flesh crawl."

Have you ever heard a grown man giggle? Uncle Edgar, drunk as usual, giggled. "Oh, I don't know. Marcella does resemble Sally. The way a caricature would!" He could be so crass.

Actually, I do look very much like mother. My features are just a bit more sharply defined.

I never could understand why daddy was always partial to Enid. I was the good one, the obedient one, the one who really sacrificed my youth to take care of daddy and mother, while dear Enid dashed off to college, then ran around Europe and God-knows-where-all until she met and married Siggy. Daddy even left her a bigger share of the money. Of course, I got the house, but you must realize that it takes money to keep up a house like this.

Enid must have left this newspaper clipping here on the desk. That's a good picture of Siggy. I never liked him, though. He always had a way of looking at me as though he could tell exactly what I was thinking. I haven't seen this particular news account before.

"Sigmund L. Stein, 39, prominent Lansing attorney, died unexpectedly at his desk yesterday afternoon. His death was attributed to an acute coronary attack. Stein, a native of Vienna, Austria, emigrated to the United States from London at the close of World War II. His parents and older brothers had perished in Nazi concentration camps.

"His only known survivors are his widow, Enid, daughter of the late Dr. and Mrs. Waldo Loxley of suburban Cherry Hill."

Just another social-climbing opportunist, that's all he was. I don't know what Enid ever saw in him. Really, it was revolting the way they couldn't keep their hands off each other. I'll never forget the way she glared at me and walked off without a word when I suggested, with the kindest intentions, what she ought to do about the baby. That was right after Siggy died, and there was only one sensible thing she could have done then about not having it.

As soon as the funeral was over I invited her to come to Cherry Hill and stay with me until after the baby was born. I

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always try to do the right thing. She agreed readily, saying it would be more convenient to Dr. Bellman's office. What she didn't mention was that it would also be convenient to Blair Cunningham. As it turns out, the convenience is going to be all mine.

I'm writing all this down to make sure everything is perfect before I begin. I am being very careful. No one needs to know. As a matter of fact, there are many things no one needs to know. Even Enid has no idea that I am not really a Loxley. I don't think daddy knew, either, and I would still be in the dark if I hadn't found that letter with mother's things. She should never have kept it. I don't even know the man's last name. You cannot imagine what such a shocking discovery can do to an impressionable girl of 19 who has grown up believing her mother was a saint.

My original scheme for Enid was to use daddy's little gun and shoot her at close range in a supposed struggle with a burglar. Last week Blair's watch was discovered missing, and I could plant it where it would be found along with the footprints outside Enid's broken bedroom window. The gun would be found in Enid's hand. I would have to dispose of daddy's shoes right away. The tracks would end at the highway, and I could easily cover any additional ones between there and Blair's house.

I really don't need much of what they call an alibi, as everyone knows how devoted I am to my sister, and also what high morals I have. However, I will need a reason for not hearing the shot, the struggle, and the window breaking. So I have arranged to be away from home.

Blair has to fly to Chicago to meet a client of his architectural firm, and it was perfectly natural for me to offer to spend the night with Beth. Her nurse usually goes home at night when Blair is there. As soon as Beth is sound asleep, I could slip out her rear door, run over here the back way, and be back in the Cunningham house within thirty minutes. I would take the short cut across the back lot, run across the highway, follow the fence behind the old schoolhouse, and then go through the Cunninghams' orchard.

If Beth should happen to wake, she would see the bathroom light and hear the shower running. My car would be parked in front of their house the whole time. No one would have any reason to suspect me, or to look for clues against anyone but a bona-fide burglar.

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It pains me to eliminate such a diligently contrived blueprint, but I must admit it has its weaknesses. I have some reservations about the footprints, and the shoes might not be easy to hide properly, with so little time to spare. I could possibly be seen, or sounds could be heard. And the one thing least to be depended on is the weather.

Sitting here in the June sunlight, it is easy to imagine that trek across the back lot and through the orchard. But what if it storms as it has been doing so many nights this month? Picture little me in a pair of outsize shoes, in the dark of night, not daring to use either a flashlight or a raincoat, trying to break the four-minute mile through those gnarled trees. No, thanks. Not if there's an easier way.

I think there is. Actually, the lighter the stew, the less chance of indigestion.

As I have mentioned, the den is very small. Enid is quite content to sleep on the studio couch that daddy kept there. It really is a comfy old couch. I think I'll have it reupholstered in red velvet for the guest room, after things blow over. There is just the one window. I have never had airconditioning installed because of my sinuses, so Enid usually keeps the window open when it's not raining. Tomorrow night, rain or not, that window will be closed, and stuck, with the aid of a little glue in the right spots. Old windows can be expected to stick in muggy weather like this.

The one change I have made in that room is the ceiling. About two years ago I had all the downstairs ceilings lowered, using those big square panels that are just laid in place. A touch of the finger can lift or move them. They not only conserve heat and deaden sound, they look very nice as well. Anyone walking into the room would not realize that in the middle of the old ceiling there is still a register, which was used for admitting warm air to the room above before I converted to electric heat. The floor register in the upstairs room, which happens to be my bedroom, is hidden by a rug.

A clan of wasps has taken up abode just above the den window. Enid doesn't know that I used an insecticide on the nest this morning and retrieved several of the little monsters for future use. They now repose in a small box in my room. I have also punched a small hole in the window screen, to account for the entrance of any wasps which might be found in the room.

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Tomorrow night Beth won't be expecting me before 9:30. Enid's usual routine is to have an early bath, then be in her room by 9:00 with a cup of hot milk, to read or watch television until she gets sleepy. As soon as she is in her room I shall quietly lock her door from the outside, after making sure "a little something" has been added to her milk—not a fatal dose, but just enough to deepen sleep so she won't fight for ventilation. It would be most unfortunate if she should be awake and smash the window for air.

Then all I shall have to do is go to my room, put on a pair of gloves, lift the rug and register, slide over a ceiling panel, spray the contents of an aerosol insecticide down on Enid, then drop the spray can and the dead wasps to the floor beside her. I shall be the one to "discover" the door key in her room the next morning. After replacing the panel, register, and rug, I'll go right over to the Cunninghams'. I'll give Blair's watch back to Beth, saying I found it in their hall. No shoes to hide, no gun to hazard. No need, either, for any clandestine rigamarole of backtracking. I'll probably be sitting beside Beth before Enid has taken her final gasp.

After the thing is done, I really should do something for poor Beth. She suffers so much, and the doctor said she might linger for a long time. It's not fair, either, to a young and vital man like Blair. I'll think of something.

From Beth Cunningham's diary, July 11:

That last day Enid came over to read to me was on Wednesday, two weeks ago. The reason I remember is that the tragedy occurred the next day, Thursday. Blair came home from the office at 2:00, so he could spend some extra time with me before his 9:50 flight to Chicago. Bless him, he is always so considerate in the little things that make a woman feel loved.

I was feeling stronger than I had for weeks, and it was such a warm day that Blair suggested a short drive. He carried me to the car and tucked a light afghan around me. I believe that drive was meant, for Blair, to be one of those vignettes of memory he could pull out and look at whenever the need arose in the coming months.

We drifted through favorite lanes and roads, absorbing their treasures with all our senses, even lingering over a shared ice-cream cone, laughing like teen-agers on a date.

Our homeward route passed the Loxley house. I asked Blair

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if we might drop in for just a few minutes, as I hadn't visited anyone else's home for such a long time, and I especially wanted to see that new staircase I had heard so much about. Blair was reluctant, but I convinced him that I wasn't too tired. It was then about 3:30.

He carried me to the door and rang the bell. We were sure someone was home, as we could see a lit television screen through a window. Blair kept ringing the bell, but there was no answer—no sound except a murmuring from the television, and a lawnmower somewhere next door.

A shadow of uneasiness crossed his face as he set me down on a stone bench to the left of the door. He peered into a window behind my shoulder, calling Enid's and Marcella's names. Suddenly he stopped. Turning slightly, I could see what he saw. Through the open doorway to Dr. Loxley's den we had a partial view of a pair of legs on the floor, sprawled oddly like those of a fallen rag doll, with something wooden lying across them. We thought it was Enid, since that was the room she had been occupying. The boy next door had stopped mowing, and came running across the lawn to see what the shouting was about. Together, he and Blair tried the doors, which were locked. They considered breaking in, but decided they had better call the police instead. While the boy ran home to telephone them, Blair took me home, then went back. He had to send his associate to Chicago that night.

It was Marcella. She had apparently fallen from a rickety stepladder and struck her head on the window sill. It wasn't the fall or the blow on the head that killed her. Her left hand had jutted through the glass, an artery had been severed, and she bled to death very quickly. The collapsed ladder lay across her knees.

A screwdriver was clenched in her right hand, and what she had been doing with it was quite an enigma at first. A ceiling panel had been pushed aside, exposing the old higher ceiling and a register. One of the screws holding the register to the ceiling had been removed. The reason was obvious when Marcella's damning, sick diary was found that night in her desk. She probably meant to write more before destroying it. Enid arrived home while the police were there. She had been at Dr. Bellman's office for her monthly prenatal.

Poor Marcella. In those dark, unavoidable periods of despair, when I cannot help feeling

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sorry for myself, it seems impossible that anything could be worse than this clawing beast growing inside my helpless body. Yet Marcella was consumed by a far more devastating beast—hatred; it destroyed her soul. Those of us who have always known the Loxleys noticed there was an off-key quality about Marcella, but I am certain that none of us recognized the depth of her hostility.

Thank God Enid is all right. I'm glad because she and Blair are going to need each other very much, very soon now.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Optimism can never be cured; human nature forbids. Following last month's famine, which compelled your mentor to fall back on the storage-bin, I had hoped that this time round would see rich crops for harvest. Well, again we avoid extremes. If there has been no overwhelming richness, at least luck has provided four new items which can be recommended without embarrassment.

Since customarily we begin with detection, pride of place must go to *Slayride*, by Dick Francis (Harper & Row, $5.95). Narrator David Cleveland, in Norway as consultant investigator when the disappearance of a British steeplechase jockey from Oslo's racecourse coincides with the disappearance of sixteen thousand kroner from the till, finds danger-fanged problems on every side. From the moment he is almost run down by a speedboat in icy water, among trainers, owners, and other enthusiasts David reels along slippery ways until the clue in the racing helmet reveals a plot even deeper than he has suspected.

In this firework display perhaps our author holds on a little too long, sending up a solitary Roman candle or two after he has touched off his grand finale set-piece. But reliable Mr. Francis, whose horse sagas contain no horseplay or any less mentionable product, combines all his ingenuity and all his skill at vivid characterization for as enjoyable a performance as readers can expect this year.

You are hereby pleasantly warned that Peter Driscoll's *In Connection with Kilshaw* (Lippincott, $7.95), superior mystery-adventure dipped in espionage, is loaded with high explosive from the start.

Into embattled Belfast, wrecked by the bitter civil strife of northern Ireland, slips a half-Irish Englishman on secret service for Britain. Harry Finn, self-styled newspaperman, must prevent full-scale war by silencing fiery J. C. Kilshaw, leader of the Protestant Loyalist Vigilantes. But equally dangerous loom up opposing Catholic Volunteers under IRA's redoubtable Sullivan,

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with Finn caught in the middle between both.

Each side is shrewd, crafty, ruthless; each side has its own mysterious plan. To avert some final explosion, without any idea what form that explosion may take, Finn enlists Caragh Hughes, the beautiful red-haired girl who calls herself his enemy. No novel has more vividly pictured envenomed hatred in The Troubles as amid flying bullets this narrative thunders towards its hair-raising climax and its satisfactory end. In mystery-adventure-espionage it may go to the head of the class.

If *The Life and Death of Peter Wade*, by Lionel Black (Stein and Day, $5.95), gives us mystery-adventure-espionage of a more casual or unbuttoned sort, for excitement and trickery it can hold its own amid any such company today.

Easy-going, hard-drinking London Newsman Johnny Trott, through his ex-wife commissioner to write the biography of a late film star suddenly dead, fears it may be pornography he must refuse. But it's not pornographic; it's merely perilous.

Beginning investigation with Norah, one of the film star's most fetching charmers, our protagonist meets uproar from an African republic undermined with secret tunnels of intrigue. Reporter Johnny, so humanly engaging he will capture your sympathy or even your affection, is now after his greatest news story. With London itself a shooting gallery, the chase leads to gunplay in a more-than-sinister embassy, pursuit across roof-tops, and a race to meet his deadline at the office.

Johnny wins; or does he? What has begun in sex, continuing in mystery or violence, now ends in wryness and poetic injustice as a fitting kind of commentary. First class.

Since espionage or counter-espionage in Britain is the whole theme of Owen Sela's *The Kiriov Tapes* (Pantheon, $5.95), brace yourself against wily professionals skilled at the double, the triple, even the quadruple cross.

Despite the presence of an old friend named Maasten, action centers round Adrian Quimper, former police officer now security chief for the most hush-hush bureau. Anatol Kiriov, Soviet defector, demands thirty thousand pounds for disclosures on tape. Kiriov and a reliable British agent are both shot dead in a flat sacred to the agent's mistress; there's treachery as well as security behind the scenes. After some confusion it's inevitable that the double cross should lead to a double twist; believe nothing, good friends. until the last word is said.

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a *NEW* short story by

STANLEY COHEN

We are happy to welcome Stanley Cohen to our pages and have the strong hunch we will be publishing much more of his work. Stanley Cohen, you may recall, was nominated by Mystery Writers of America for a First Novel Edgar; his book, TAKING GARY FELDMAN, *was judged one of the five best First Mystery Novels of 1970.*

Here is Mr. Cohen's first story for EQMM — a "strangely chilling" story about an incident in the life of Wesley Griggs ("Sorry, Mr. Griggs"), an incident in the life of our times. Wesley Griggs was going "to leave his mark, to make that day on Connally long remembered"...

THAT DAY ON CONNALLY

by STANLEY COHEN

Sighting through the heavy snowfall, he lined up the cross-hairs on her chest as the cable brought her into view. He focused on a brightly colored emblem on her parka, perfectly and conveniently located, and after following it for a second or two he squeezed off the shot. The girl heaved against the safety bar, then slumped back into the ornate seat. Another perfect hit.

How many was that? Eleven? An even dozen? Maybe even thirteen. He had lost count. All clean kills. Only one had required two shots. A big man who had shifted in the seat just as he fired. The man began struggling after the first bullet hit and he fired a second with greater concentration, instantly stopping the man's wild thrashing movements. But he'd hated having to fire a second time — it was a blow to his otherwise perfect score.

He leaned the rifle against the wall of the shed and pressed the handle of the chair-lift drive. A little farther. Another twenty feet or so. As the chair glided into the landing area

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beneath the shed he cut the power, just as the ski-patrol attendant would have done to help a skier out of the seat.

He moved quickly up to the chair, pushed the sagging body backward, raised the safety bar, and pulled the man onto the platform. Then, turning him over, he gripped the man under his armpits and dragged him along the planked floor to the back of the platform and toward the convenient little hollow behind the shed. When he reached the dropoff into the hollow, he gave the body a push and then a kick and watched it slide on its own, downward and into the pile with the others.

He hustled back into the shed and grabbed the ski poles out of the holder on the lift-chair. He wheeled and hurled them toward the array of bodies, skis, and poles. Then he returned to the lift drive control and started it again. Time to bring another nice live target into view.

The girl in the seat still some fifty feet out showed no signs of life. Why should she? Fish in a barrel. A human shooting gallery. A helpless human form moving slowly in a set path at 50 yards or less. And with a scope sight. Almost unsportsmanlike.

He thought about snipers who'd made the news in recent years. Kids with 22's, popping at cars on parkways near big cities, never hoping to score a clean kill. Or butchers, hauling an arsenal to the top of some tall building and blasting away at everybody in sight. Suicidal exhibitionists! Morons! With no hope whatever of walking away from it. No imagination. No planning. No class. He'd show the world how it was done by a master. A real master. And in the process he'd return a small favor to the ski community.

His mind riffled back through the countless interviews he'd had with the honchos of all the ski mountains.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs, but we've completed our recruiting for this year's ski patrol."

"But, sir, I'm no ordinary skier. Look, I can make these guys you've been hiring look like beginners."

"I'm afraid we're just full up at this time."

"All I ask is a chance. Before Vietnam I was the lead instructor at Stratton. I taught the advanced classes. I even trained most of the ski patrol. All the college hotshots. Don't you understand? I'm a pro. The best."

"I can appreciate that, Mr. Griggs, but we're just not taking on any more men this season."

"Look, somebody's got to give me a break. Skiing's my life . . .

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It's because of my war record, isn't it?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs, we're just not hiring."

"You've been running ads, looking for guys."

"We've finished filling our roster."

"You know, this isn't a fair shake. I couldn't help all that publicity. I had no way of stopping it. I didn't want it. Besides, I was acquitted. Completely. They let me go clean. I was only a noncom. I was acting under orders at all times."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs."

"Look, if you'd been over there as long as I was, you'd have reacted the same. All I wanted was to stay alive and get back. It got to where you couldn't tell the women from the men, or the kids, either, for that matter. There were even instances where our guys *did* get it from kids or women. That was a mess, over there. You've got to have been there to know about it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs."

"Look, I was given a clean bill and all I ask is to get back into skiing. I couldn't help all that publicity. You can't keep me out forever. I want to make my living on skis."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs, I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs, I'm sorry . . ."

He set himself and took a breath and followed the next target that moved into view and fired and smiled at the whispered crack of the silenced rifle and at the way the young man lurched in the seat and then collapsed. Another clean hit. And he watched the chairs move closer. Almost time to stop the lift and take off the chick with the plugged emblem.

He was a master at two skills. Skiing wasn't his only area of expertise. He could shoot. And he liked shooting. Back in Nam he had become his company's cleanup man. As the unrelenting tension of the hide-and-seek fighting worked on him, he found he could best keep his head by taking pleasure in doing what he did well. If he was to kill to survive, he might as well be good at it. And to be good at it he had to like doing it.

His C.O. had recognized his instinctual capacity and had given him all the "special assignments." He soon grew to feed on them. He liked good clean kills because they were a challenge. Tough to pull off in the jungle. But he also liked those "special assignments," the closer-range "less competitive" jobs. And he had liked doing them with neatness and finesse.

He stopped the lift and began struggling with the dead girl's body. She'd been good-looking. A dish. He would have liked

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knowing her a little better before she decided to take the chair-lift up Old Imperial that particular morning. But too bad. There would be other chicks.

Since she was light and feminine, he put his shoulder into her waist and hoisted her up and carried her to the edge of the little pocket where he had been piling the bodies. He dropped her onto the incline and she slid down among the others. Too bad about her. She was nice. Really nice. She'd picked the wrong day to ski Old Imperial.

How many more should he take before skiing down and driving away? He probably had enough already to leave his mark on the ski world for a long time. How many people would start thinking twice and maybe just stay home and watch TV before planning a weekend of skiing? A weekend of being a helpless target, dangling from a lift-cable, moving slowly toward the top of a mountain? The operators were going to pay for keeping him out.

He'd returned from Nam in the summer and could hardly wait for the snow. But that one sticky morning when the story broke about the incident in the town by the river marked the beginning of a nightmare even greater than all those in the stinking jungle. Who the hell ever heard of locking somebody up for defending his country? "Everything I did I did under orders, sir."

"Some of our witnesses feel that you seemed to have more than just a desire to carry out orders on the morning in question."

"Sir, I was doing as I was told. We were at war, regardless what college kids might say. I was mainly interested in survival. It could have been them or me."

"That's for the court to decide."

The punishing uncertainties of the trial and the confinement dragged out for months, during which he was restricted inside the base, and he watched the season come and go, reading the daily ski reports when he could get a paper. He was finally acquitted and released but his name, Wesley Griggs, had become a familiar phrase, almost a synonym for the senseless excesses of the war.

As soon as the next season approached, he began his tour of the Northeastern ski areas, looking for a job, a full-time skiing job, ready at last to begin living again, to buckle on the new boots and the gleaming new Mark II's and hit the slopes and let the ski air with

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its exhilarating clarity flush the glooms and stenches of jungles and army posts out of his head.

He sensed he was a marked man after the first job interview. He was apprehensive on the second and the turndown came without surprise. Thereafter he went from mountain to mountain, playing out the complete dialogue, all the way to the final, repeated, "I'm sorry, Mr. Griggs." Anticipating each rejection, he would become so antagonistic the operators found him oppressive, almost frightening.

After he was completely certain no operator would have the likes of him with his record and reputation working their precious mountain, he decided to spend a little time hunting. Get out his rifle, his other love, and get off a round or two at a deer. After watching the animal drop with a single, clean, perfect shot he suddenly made up his mind about what he was going to do. He immediately began planning details.

He had been a ski fanatic even as a child, a scrawny kid, often cutting school, always skulking around one or another of the mountains near his home in Vermont, listening to instructors teach rich kids, sneaking onto the lifts or stealing lift passes off jackets in the main lodge and skiing the slopes from sunup to dusk on a progression of stolen skis. He dropped out of high school in his junior year, bought an old heap, and drove from mountain to mountain, all over New England, satisfying himself that he was master of every slope. Having become a brilliant skier, he managed to get into a ski patrol the following year and within the two more years was the youngest No. 1 ever in the patrol at Stratton, one of his favorite mountains with its profusion of runs. Then he was drafted.

When he began planning his payoff to the operators for their kindness and consideration, he remembered the Old Imperial run at Connally Mountain, a tough isolated slope with an antiquated lift, bucket-like seats strung out some 75 feet apart, slow-moving, the patrol member in the shed at the top stopping the lift and helping each skier out of the bucket. The run was steep in places, and long, a challenging and satisfying run for even the best skiers, which explained its popularity despite the time-consuming ride to the top.

And he also remembered the bend in cable direction as the run approached the summit so that only two chairs at a time were in view from the shed. He

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had only to get a rifle with a removable stock, ride to the top of Old Imperial with the dismantled weapon strapped under his coat, shoot the attendant in the back, and take over the mountain. After making a good solid kill he'd simply leave the lift stopped, ski down, get into his car, and drive away. He'd be gone before the patrol could get up to the summit on the "cat" to check out the problem...

He watched the next chair turn the corner and move into view with another target, a guy in a fancy sweater and stocking cap. No heavy jacket. Probably a good skier. This would be the last one. Pop him off and call it quits. He'd gotten enough to leave his mark, to make that day on Connally long remembered. No use taking unnecessary chances.

He sighted in on a couple of stripes in the sweater's design, a hair left of center. Perfect. Follow the target for a second or two, maintain concentration, squeeze. But a split second before he fired, the skier reached down to touch his boot. He'd missed completely!

The skier looked up abruptly, stared at the shed and at patches of woods to the right and to the left. Then he flipped up the safety bar on the chair and leaped quickly out of the seat, not even bothering to take his poles, dropping the ten or fifteen feet to the snow and falling over.

How had he missed? He had to get off another shot! Drop him quick before he got to his feet and skied around the bend and out of sight. He lined up on the skier as the skier struggled upright to start downhill. The same two stripes, from the back instead of the front. He squeezed but the gun clicked harmlessly. Damn! Why hadn't he reloaded? Why hadn't he kept count? How could he have been so stupid?

The skier, starting a little slowly without poles, moved downward, gaining speed, and finally swept to the right, around the crook in the slope and out of view.

No need to panic. Just get rid of the gun and ski down. No clues. Nothing. He didn't know from nothing. That's all. No, he didn't see or hear anything. No fingerprints, even if they found the gun. He'd handled it with glove-liners and had rubbed it carefully to make sure. No panic, no panic.

He ran a few yards along the path to the summit, a spot just beyond the little hollow. The bodies were becoming speckled with snow. He stuffed the rifle into a drift near the base of a tree and smoothed over the spot

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where the gun went in. A few minutes of fresh snow and there'd be no trace. Nothing to worry about.

He hurried back to the shed, set down his skis, and stepped into them. Grabbing his poles and gloves, he moved back along the path. The lift was motionless, the nearest chair containing a crumpled body wearing skis, the second chair empty. except for poles. He pushed off, skiing down the slope with style and grace.

The long ride down gave him time to think, to anticipate questions and plan his responses. No, he hadn't seen anything unusual going on. Accidents? No. Anybody with a gun? You kidding me? No. And no, he didn't know of any reason why nobody'd come down the slope in the last little while. No, he didn't know why the lift wasn't moving — it was running fine when he got up there and he'd taken a bad fall on the way down and had stopped and rested a few minutes to get himself back together.

He began to feel strangely chilled and realized that despite the air temperature and the wind of skiing and the snow in his face, his body was steamy with sweat.

He glanced up at skiers stranded in the unmoving chairs and hoped they'd still be hanging there, freezing their noses off, when he drove away. He looked down and ahead. A good slope. One of the best. Let the people in the chairs watch a pro take it down.

As he reached the lower stretches of the run and the main lodge came into view, he saw the "cat" just starting up the slope, carrying two members of the patrol, each wearing his bright blue jacket and blue hat. They had a long ride to the top. He was moving a lot faster. He had plenty of time. More than enough. He'd had much closer calls than this in Nam.

He continued down toward the area around the main lodge where all the lifts took on their loads and headed up the mountain. Lots of skiers. They'd remember this day at Connally. They might even lose some of their interest in skiing. He had only to get through the crowd unnoticed, over to the parking lot, then get the hell out of here.

As he drew nearer he was able to separate the crowd into individuals. He picked out the skier in the fancy sweater, the one he'd missed with his last shot. The guy was standing in a group, right where the slope leveled out, watching him approach. Nothing to worry about. They couldn't possibly know anything yet.

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Several in the group wore the mountain's bright blue jackets. He recognized the honcho who ran the mountain, a big overage college Joe. He thought about the interview with him several months back and wondered if the creep would remember him. Then he spotted the fat guy who ran the ski school. And one or two more from the patrol. And a cop, the trooper, the big one with the mustache who'd been directing traffic, wearing his shiny, navy-blue jacket with the big badge and the fur collar, and the hat with the fur-lined earmuffs tied up and sticking out like wings. When it became obvious the group was waiting for him, he began plowing and slowed as he reached them.

"Excuse me," the honcho said, "but did you notice what's wrong at the top? The operator has stopped the lift and we don't know why."

No look of recognition. The creep didn't remember him. Still, his heart was pounding. This was it. The last hurdle. The parking lot was less than a hundred yards away. "Uh, everything looked okay to me when I was up top. I noticed the lift stopped, too. Why is that?"

"We thought you might be able to tell *us*. You just came down."

"No, as a matter of fact I left the top some time ago. Had a fall about halfway down. Stopped and rested a while. Sprained my ankle a little." He felt dizzy from his churning pulse and wondered if they could tell.

"You seem all right, now."

"Yeah, it's a lot better."

"This man says someone took a shot at him up there. Did you hear anything that sounded like a shot?"

"Shot? You kidding? What kinda shot? Hell, don't say that. I'll be scared to go back up. No, I didn't hear any shot."

"Did you see anyone with anything that might have been a gun of any kind?" the cop asked. "Anything at all?"

He hesitated, to appear to be trying to remember. "No. Not a thing."

"Well, we've sent up two members of the patrol," the manager said. "We should know something in a few minutes."

"Probably nothing serious." He started to ski slowly out of the group and toward the parking lot.

"Hey," one of the ski patrol said. "What's that all over the shoulder of your jacket? Blood?"

He stopped and froze. His mouth fell open and he looked at all of them, his eyes going from face to face. The chick! He

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dropped his poles and clutched at his right shoulder with his left hand, still looking from face to face. As he did, his right arm dropped against his side and he felt the box of shells, still about half full, in his jacket pocket. He'd forgotten to bury them with the gun.

"Well? What about it?" The cop studied his face, then reached out and tugged at his shoulder to look at the stain.

He didn't answer.

"I think you'd better wait here with us till the patrol gets to the top," the cop said.

"Uh, I can't. I gotta get going. I really got to go." He thought about trying to run but he was on skis and he'd dropped his poles. And he was surrounded by blue jackets.

"So early?" the cop said. "You've got an eight-dollar lift ticket there and it's not even time to break for lunch yet. You'd just better wait here with us till we hear from the patrol."

The manager squinted at him and said, "You look very familiar. Have we met before?"

But he hadn't even heard the question. He'd just remembered something funny. The blood on his jacket wasn't fresh. He had worn the jacket hunting and had messed it up lifting the doe he'd shot. A silly grin spread across his face and he began to snigger and then laugh uncontrollably.

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a NEW Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

Lillian de la Torre writes us that "affairs like that of 'The Blackamoor Unchain'd' happened more than once in Eighteenth Century London." And, of course, Lord Mansfield's judgment in the Somerset case on June 22, 1772, "which at last put a stop to such disgraceful episodes, is history."

Here is one of Lillian de la Torre's most fascinating historical "detector" stories, featuring again that great early criminologist and humanitarian, Dr. Sam: Johnson, and that great early "Watson," James Boswell. . .

THE BLACKAMOOR UNCHAIN'D

(as told by James Boswell, Spring, 1772)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

The Negro was chained to the mainmast, and the vessel was clearing for Jamaica. No better prospect appeared at journey's end for him than the slave block, the plantation, the cane-brake, and the lash.

What remedy?

But let us take things in order.

That my learned friend, Dr. Sam: Johnson, *detector* of crimes and righter of wrongs, was openly zealous in opposing the institution of human slavery, is well known.

"Here's to the next insurrection of the Negroes in the West Indies!"

Such was the toast with which, I am told, he once scandalized some very grave scholars at Oxford.

Insurrections there were in plenty among the black slaves on

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the plantations of Jamaica, and they were put down in torture and blood. Such episodes rouzed my moral friend's deepest indignation.

"Jamaica! — great wealth and dreadful wickedness — a den of tyrants!" I have heard him growl.

"It is impossible," he declared more coolly, "not to conceive that men in their original state were equal."

That he genuinely thought so, in spite of his spectacular attacks on frantick "levellers" like Mrs. Macaulay, was abundantly proved by the tenderness and respect he extended to his black servant, Frank Barber.

Frank came to him from that very "den of tyrants," Jamaica, brought thence in his boyhood as body-servant to a plantation owner. Left his freedom and a legacy in his owner's will, Frank came into Johnson's service before my time, in the year 1752, close upon Mrs. Johnson's lamented death; and Johnson's "boy" he had been ever since.

Tho' in this spring of 1772 he was thirty years of age or more, he still looked the youthful foot-boy, for he was of slender make and low stature, and his blue-black countenance never lost its look of innocence. He was narrow of shoulder and flank, and had a thin neck, spindle shanks, and long slim black hands faintly pink in the palm. His head was round and fuzzed with close-curled woolly hair. His thick lips pursed, his large black eyes showed an ivory gleam as they moved. He spoke softly, with a lazy lilt, but correctly, for Dr. Johnson had seen him well schooled.

'Twas on 21 March, 1772, that I — James Boswell, advocate, your most obedient — came once more from my dwelling in Edinburgh to visit my friends in London. Setting myself to rights, I hastened to wait upon my revered friend Dr. Sam: Johnson at his house in Johnson's Court.

Frank answered the door, trim in fustian breeches and striped waistcoat.

"You are welcome to London, Mr. Boswell. Dr. Johnson is with Miss Williams. This way, sir."

In the ground-floor apartment of Miss Williams, the blind poetess, I found Dr. Johnson by the teapot, and a storm brewing in it. While Frank procured and dressed the viands, Miss Williams presided over the household economy, and the pair, thus divided in authority, were often at odds. Today, in her lady-like soft

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voice, she scolded Dr. Johnson about the alleged short-comings of his black attendant.

"So, Dr. Johnson," she uttered sarcastically, "there (pointing at Frank) — there stands your 'scholar,' your 'philosopher' —"

Frank beat a hasty retreat.

"— upon educating whom you have spent so many hundreds of pounds! And how are you repaid? Waste! Where's the rest of the pork and pease? Where's yesterday's loaf? Who drank the milk jug empty?"

"Perhaps the *Pook,* who sweeps the hearth by night, and drinks out the milk in payment," suggested my friend, rallying her mildly. "We had such beneficent *Brownies* about the kitchen, Mr. Boswell, when I was a child in Lichfield."

"I doubt it not," returned Miss Williams smartly, she being Welsh and of a credulous turn, "and that's another thing. Your house is haunted, sir, there's something walks in the attick."

"Frank by name, I suppose, since he is bedded there."

"It has walked while Frank was before me."

"It walks in the attick and eats the cold victuals," I summed up. "Here's a *mystery* for you, sir."

"'Tis soon solved. Follow me, Mr. Boswell, to the attick."

"Where you'll find, I warrant you, that Frank has been up to mischief," Miss Williams tossed after us.

There was no appearance of mischief about the woebegone figure on the bed in the attick. A quilt was pulled about the narrow shoulders, the round woolly head was turned to the wall.

"What, Frank lad, art ill, boy?" enquired Dr. Johnson with concern.

The blue-black countenance turned to us. Simultaneously there was a clatter on the stair, and Frank Barber came into the room.

We stared. The unknown blackamoor was thin and gaunt, and his kinky head was bandaged. He turned dark eyes upon us, and said nothing.

"So here's our ghost," observed Dr. Johnson.

"And our *Brownie* too," I added, "that eats up the victuals."

"I found him starving in the street," burst out Frank. "Sure, sir, you'd never grudge him a bite and a sup?"

"Why, boy, you know I would not," rejoined Johnson gravely, "so why this secrecy?"

"I promised it him, sir. He's an escaped slave, and fears recapture."

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"A slave? In London?" I interjected.

"Why, then," replied Dr. Johnson, "he's but one of many. The West Indians bring them hither, as Frank was brought. Well, my lad, account for yourself. Who's your master?"

"Stand up!" admonished Frank anxiously, "and make a reverence to the gentleman."

The fellow came slowly to his feet. Like Frank, he was low of stature and slender of build, with lank shanks and long slim hands, and his dusky visage bore a look both innocent and proud. He wore an old shirt of Frank's and nothing else. He executed a kind of awkward salaam, at which Frank nodded approval, and spoke in a musical drawl.

"Cap'n Standart, Sallee Plantation, Jamaica. Cap'n beat me —"

"He beat him without provocation," put in Frank, "under drink taken, and broke his head, as you see." The fellow nodded and touched his bandage. "What could he do but run, and what could I do but succour him?"

"What's your name, boy?" asked my friend gently.

"Quashie, marsa."

"He may stay?" enquired Frank anxiously.

"Quashie may stay, and share your couch and your victuals."

To my surprise, Quashie, beaming, expressed his satisfaction in song:

"Calipash! Calipee!" his ditty ran, in a sweet plaintive voice:

"Calipash! Calipee!
"O how happy us all be!"

He even essayed a little dance step on his long slim black feet.

"No more o' that, Quashie!" said Frank sharply, scandalized; "make your reverence and retire."

"Well, be easy, Quashie," smiled Dr. Johnson, "Frank shall take care of you till we see what must be done with you."

"Not go back to Cap'n!" cried Quashie in alarm. "Never!"

"I hope not, Quashie. But 'tis a touchy affair, and must be thought on. Come, Mr. Boswell."

He led the way down the stair, shaking his head.

"What will become of poor Quashie, I know not."

"Surely," I said, "no man can hold a slave in England?"

"That's to be seen," replied my friend. "The matter is *sub judice* before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield. There's a cause before him between an escaped slave, Somerset by name, and his former master. Till 'tis settled, Quashie must keep close."

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"What hinders the settling?"

"There are fourteen thousand such slaves in England. My Lord Mansfield shrinks from freeing them all at once with his single word. He'd like to find an excuse, as he has done before, lack of documents or so, to set this particular slave free and spare the general judgement. But this time he's caught a Tartar. Somerset won't have it, nor will his sponsor, the noted crusader against slavery, Mr. Granville Sharp. Nor, for his part, will the master neither.

"But Lord Mansfield procrastinates, and thus the fate of Quashie hangs in the balance, and that of fourteen thousand like him. Meanwhile the boy is Captain Standart's property, and may be shipped out for Jamaica, there to be worked, lashed, even killed, at pleasure. We must keep him under cover."

'Twas easier said than done. If one black boy in Johnson's Court was a curiosity, two were a nine days' wonder. Soon we had a visitation.

The visitant was a thin, sallow, upright personage in a red coat. He presented himself in the one-pair-of-stairs sitting room, bowed stiffly, curtly uttered his name — "Captain Standart, to command —" and came straight to the point:

"It comes to my ears, sir, that you are detaining my neger slave Quashie, and I require you'll hand him over instanter."

Standing four-square before the fire-place in his old rusty brown broadcloth, Dr. Johnson put up his well-marked brows.

"Require?"

"Yes, sir, require. I demand my property."

"Your property? That's to be seen."

"Aye, sir, my property, to the value of fifty pounds, which he'll fetch on the slave block in Jamaica."

"You must catch him first," smiled Johnson.

"I'll catch him, never fear," snarled Captain Standart, "and I'll have the law on *you* for a thief."

"As to that, the law shall decide."

But the Captain was breathing fire and alcohol. He had come to bully his antagonist, and when one threat failed to move my intrepid friend, he was ready with another.

"D-mn the law!" he exclaimed. "You shall answer to me in person."

"Why, so I do, I answer, do your worst."

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"You shall answer in the field."

"How, a duello!" I exclaimed, half aghast, half excited.

"If old square-toes don't fear me," sneered the Captain uncivilly.

"I hold the duello in abhorrence," said my moral friend calmly, "yet I don't fear you. I'll meet you, sir, at the time and place, and with the weapons of my choice, as is the right of the challenged."

"Then chuse," snapped the soldier.

"I chuse *here* and *now,* and for weapons — here are weapons to hand (indicating the fire-irons). You may take the poker, and I'll make shift with the tongs."

So saying, he seized them up and made them to snap a scant inch from the startled slave-owner's nose.

"Unheard of!" ejaculated the Captain, backing off.

"You have no taste for my weapons? Nor I for yours. I'll not run you through or shoot you down, sir, for Scripture bids us do no murder; but I'll wring your nose if I can come at it," cried the burly philosopher, snapping the tongs wildly, "so *en garde*!"

"The man is mad!" cried the Jamaican, dodging in alarm. He gained the door, flung it open, and was gone. We heard his boots clatter on the stair, and Dr. Johnson's Olympian laughter followed him.

"A pretty brute to *own* a man," he observed, sobering. "We must keep Quashie out of his hands."

Again time passed. Quashie mended and grew strong. We would hear his delighted chuckle below stairs, or his mellow voice singing strange little melodies by the kitchen fire. He had a ditty for every contingency. "Rain crow fly away" greeted the downpour. "Stranger come riding" announced the caller. "Calipash! Calipee!" did for grace before meat. This mysterious incantation, I learned, called upon the Jamaicans' favorite comestible, green turtle.

No such regale of Aldermen adorned Dr. Johnson's table; but Quashie was equally happy with the pork and pease, and gobbled it down. This pained Frank, who strove earnestly to improve his protégé's demeanour; but cheerfulness was always breaking in. Miss Williams delighted to hear Quashie sing, and the pair quietly made up an alliance against Frank's authority, at which Dr. Johnson smiled indulgently. He had come to repose confidence in Quashie's ministrations, approved his progress under Frank's tutelage, and meditated sending him, too, to be schooled in the country. But fate interposed.

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One bright May morning, when we returned from breakfasting abroad, Quashie was gone.

"Where is Quashie?" repeated Miss Williams fretfully. "Why do you ask, sir, when you sent for him yourself, to fetch your prayer book to the Mitre?"

"My *prayer book*? What would I be about, with a prayer book at a tavern?"

"Nay, sir, who knows your whim? Frank was gone for provisions, and Quashie found the book where it lies on your bureau, and ran off with it."

"He ran, I fear, straight into the hands of Captain Standart, who has thus tricked us all."

"What's to be done?" I cried.

"Nay, I know not. He may be any where, and meeting any fate, even death itself."

"Come, sir," I urged, making for the street door, "we cannot sit idle."

"'Twill not help to run about at random. No, sir, we must have intelligence to proceed upon."

As we stood at the door, wondering thus which way to turn, a hackney coach clattered into the court and pulled up before us.

"One of you Sam: Johnson?" demanded the coachman hoarsely.

"I am Sam: Johnson."

The coachman dropped the reins. His nag drooped in an attitude of repose, and the fellow descended. He smelled of gin and horse.

"This is your prayer book?"

He shewed the neat script on the fly leaf: *Sam: Johnson, Johnson's Court.*

I could sense my friend's excitement, but he answered calmly enough:

"It is mine. How did you come by it?"

"Worth a little something, an't it?" demanded the coachman.

"Perhaps; and more, if you tell me where you got it."

"I didn't steal it," said the fellow truculently.

"Of course not. Where did you find it, then? For a shilling (producing one)."

"Two," said the Jehu instantly.

For answer I pulled a shilling from my pocket and held it up next to Johnson's. The coachman looked from shilling to shilling, seemed minded to have more, and then shrugged.

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"At the West India docks."

"At the docks! Does a ship lie there?"

"Yes, sir, the *Guinea Gold* is laden; she'll sail for Jamaica with the morning tide."

"Bravo, Quashie!" cried Dr. Johnson. "By dropping the book, he has contrived to send us a message. You, friend, is your coach for hire?"

"What else?"

"Then here's your two shillings, and a third for earnest. You shall be ours for the day."

"Ben Handey's at your sarvice, gentlemen both."

I was for speeding straight to the docks. But the first errand, it seemed, was to the milliner, whither Frank was sent with a billet, and whence he returned with a large band-box. Meanwhile, Dr. Johnson donned his best array, full-skirted purple camlet coat and large bushy grizzled wig of state.

Soon our little entourage was ready to take coach. Dr. Johnson carried his stout oak stick. Frank Barber attended us. At him I stared. He was tricked out like a courtesan's monkey, in a brocaded caftan — somewhat the worse for wear — and a large swathed turban with fringes enclosed his inky countenance.

"Well, Dr. Johnson," I remarked, "I never thought to see you attended by such a gaudy page."

"Among West Indian nabobs," replied my friend, "it behooves us to cut a figure. Frank, have you the gallipot?"

"Yes, sir (shewing such a small pot as ladies use for pomatum)."

"Have you the tools?"

"In my waistcoat pockets, sir."

"Then let us go. Drive on, Handey."

A motley posse, we rattled towards the docks. I marvelled how we were to gain access to the ship; but I was soon instructed.

We scented the vessel before we saw it.

"Phew," I ejaculated, "what cargo does she carry, that stinks so perniciously?"

"Don't you know, sir? She's a slaver. 'Tis human cargo that smells so high. Pah!" Ben Handey spat emphatically. "Guinea gold, that's slaves, sir. The stench of 'em can't be quelled. She beats about the triangle — gauds and cloth out to the Guinea coast, there to trade for slaves, and carry them by the middle passage for sale in Jamaica, and so home laden with rum, sugar, and tobacco. 'Tis very profitable."

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" 'Tis infamous," growled Dr. Johnson. "But what does she in London port? That's a Liverpool trade."

"Nay, I know not, but there she lies."

The *Guinea Gold* was a dirty-looking vessel of small tonnage, with dingy sails furled, linked to the dock by a plank walk. From the deck a burly person in authority looked across. Dr. Johnson measured him, and coolly mounted.

"Captain — ?"

"Westover, what then?"

"From the City Wharfinger," I recited my lesson. I knew not whether there was such an official, but as it fell out, Captain Westover, unused to London port, knew no more than I; and my words were backed by a most impressive document of Johnson's concocting, gaudily sealed in red. The Captain frowned at it myopically.

"As Inspector of Wharves," said I glibly, "I am directed to view your ship before she sails; and my friend comes with me, Colonel Johnson, a wealthy nabob of Barbadoes, who having money to put out, desires to see how the slave trade goes on."

"Scurvily," grumbled the Captain; "but view what you will. Mr. MacNeill!"

MacNeill proved to be the ship's supercargo, a sandy little tight-mouthed person who led us about in silence. We walked the deck, where sailor-men in loose pantaloons and tarry pigtails busied themselves mysteriously with coils of ropes. They stared curiously at Frank's gauds, but said nothing. I drew from my pocket the tablets I invariably carry about me (to record my friend's memorable discourses) and officiously made notes. Quashie, the real object of our search, was nowhere to be seen.

From the deck we descended the stair to the chart room and the officers' quarters. All was narrow and dark and empty, but shipshape and ready to clear. No Quashie.

We passed forward to the forecastle, where dwelt the crew. We saw their few hammocks and sleeping gear trussed up out of the way against the wooden side. Well forward, a thin sailor in greasy slops scoured a pot. He gave us a surly look. No Quashie.

"So, sir," said MacNeill, "you've seen how we live. Will it please you go up?"

"No, sir," said Johnson, "we'll go down."

"As you will," shrugged MacNeill. "The hold is in order, but I fear it won't please you."

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The stench from the open hatch was already turning our stomachs, but we descended the narrow ladder, and stood in the darkness of the hold. I felt Frank shudder. As our eyes adjusted, we saw that the airless space, barely six feet high, was ringed round about by a double shelf, too low for a man to sit erect. MacNeill became voluble.

"On these shelves," said he, "we may transport two or three hundred blacks from Guinea to Jamaica, chained two and two —"

The chains were visible, stapled to the wall.

"And on the voyage out to Guinea, as you see, the shelves serve for the trinkets and trade goods."

Indeed the surfaces were crammed with boxes and bales. Loading was done, and the ship was ready to sail.

"And what's this ironmongery?" With his oak stick, Dr. Johnson poked at a tangle of implements in a recess.

"Why, sir, to control the negers."

With a shudder I made out the sinister shape of a cat-o'-nine-tails with barbed lashes, spiked collars, leg-irons, and manacles. My gorge rose.

"Well thought on," said Johnson coolly; "and what's backwards of the hatch?"

"More shelves, sir; and there, of course, the mainmast is stepped."

We made it out by the faint light from the hatch over head. 'Twas a great oak tree trunk, affixed to the ship's spine; and against it, as if embracing it, sat poor Quashie. His slim wrists were encircled with iron bracelets, rivetted on, and a chain round the mast held him fast, so that he could sit or stand against it, but not turn away. He had no song now. He rolled his eyes upon us in silent despair.

"What's to do here?" asked Johnson, still maintaining his character of a stranger from Barbadoes.

" 'Tis a runaway slave, sir, consigned to Jamaica to be sold. They'll teach him better there, I warrant you," said MacNeill with satisfaction.

"And a good thing too," Dr. Johnson seconded the sentiment. "You, Frank, you scoundrel, look on him and be warned," he added with affected menace.

"Yes, marsa," said Frank.

"Well, let us go. Pray, Mr. MacNeill, go you before. You, Mister Wharfinger (politely naming me by my supposed function), shall

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boost from behind, and so I'll get myself up this precipice."

MacNeill shewed his agility by scampering up. Dr. Johnson put one foot to the ladder, and paused. His oak stick had vanished, and must be found. Frank and I were put to the search:

"Go you abaft the mainmast, Frank, and you, Mister Wharfinger, forward. And, Bozzy (calling after me), turn over the ironmongery."

Inwardly shrinking, I did so, setting up a prolonged clangour and clatter, before the lost object finally came to light by the ladder foot. Satisfied, my friend ascended another rung of the ladder, and again paused. This time the delay caused by a slightly loose shoe buckle, which must be (with much difficulty and a handy scrap of packthread) secured, lest the wearer trip in ascending.

"Well, sir, what's the matter?" called MacNeill impatiently.

"Nothing, sir, all's put to rights. Here we come. Frank! Where's that rascal?"

"Here, marsa." Caftan and turban appeared beside us.

"Up we go! Boost, Frank! And you, Mister Wharfinger, pray pass up my stick and follow on."

I followed on. When I came up out of the noisome hold, I saw the departing flick of a brocade hem at the officers' stair head, and heard my friend's sonorous voice saying:

"Make haste, Frank! You must take coach and hurry to Johnson's Court with a billet."

At the stair foot, MacNeill stood gazing upward and scratching his ear. I tapped his shoulder and mumbled something about his papers. In his musty lair next the chart room, he placed them before me. After solemn scrutiny, I pronounced them in order, as indeed they were for aught I knew. Gratified, the supercargo pressed upon me some specimens of the ship's lading: sundry gaudy scraps of coarse cloth, with a handful of brummagem glass beads. I uttered profuse thanks, and took elaborate leave of him.

When I issued at last into the blessed clean air of the deck, Dr. Johnson's servitor had a written billet clutched in his greasy black hand, and was crossing the plank to the wharf, the while his master called after him:

"And hark'ee, Frank, bid the coachman make haste in returning."

An emphatick nod shook the turban fringes, and Ben Handey's coach jiggled them from our sight.

"All done?" rasped Captain Westover behind me.

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"The report must be writ on the spot," cut in Dr. Johnson. "Be about it, Mister Wharfinger. You've time till Frank returns with an answer."

"An answer to what?" growled the Captain suspiciously.

"To my billet, sir," replied my friend blandly. "Now as to the blacks aboard ship, sir, pray tell, how do you manage —?"

He drew the scowling fellow into private discourse by the rail. My ears caught scraps of the slaver's profane complaints about the perversity of the blackamoors and the difficulties of the slave trade. Warned by a glance from Dr. Johnson, I perched on a coil of rope, drew forth my tablets, and fell to scribbling. Having nothing official to record, I began to narrate the affecting story of Quashie. How would it end?

I did not see Frank come aboard, but when our hackney coach was once more perceived upon the wharf, Dr. Johnson pronounced:

"Frank must be returned. Frank!" he bellowed. "Where's my lacquey? He needs a beating. *Frank*!"

At this moment, who should come striding up the gang-plank but — Captain Standart! At sight of us he started.

"What, old square-toes, what do you here? After Quashie, no doubt? Well, I have him safe, sir. He'll soon learn his lesson."

"No doubt, sir," said Dr. Johnson coldly. "I'll bid you good day, sir. *Frank*!"

Up from below came Frank, his brocades gleaming, his wooly head bare.

"Quashie!" cried Captain Standart, collaring him " 'Tis my black (shaking him)! How have you got loose? And in these cloathes!"

"No, sir," said Frank smoothly, in his best schooled English, "I am not your black: I am Dr. Johnson's black, and I desire you'll not detain me."

"There's something deep here," muttered Standart, loosing him reluctantly, "and I'll get to the bottom of it."

"Do," said Johnson, "go as deep in iniquity as you please, but stand out of my way (gripping his oaken stick). You, Frank, you scoundrel, where's your headgear?"

"Alack, sir, blown overboard."

Dr. Johnson caught him a smart box o' the ear.

"Be off, you ideot!"

To my amazement, the lofty philosopher, brandishing his stick,

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cudgelled Frank before him down the plank onto the wharf, while the black protected his pate with his arms. Captain Westover by the rail roared with laughter as at a comedy, and Captain Standart snorted and turned on his heel.

"Make haste, Ben," said Dr. Johnson, "for Captain Standart has gone below; he'll explode any minute."

As the Jehu encouraged his tired nag to exertion, sure enough there was a roar from the ship, and as we clattered away, Captain Standart started to the rail, his saturnine visage purple, and shook his fist after us.

BEN HANDEY: What ails the fellow?

JOHNSON (smiling): He has discovered the disappearance of Quashie.

BOSWELL: But what of the chain and manacles?

JOHNSON: 'Twas Frank that managed it. The hog's lard did it, boy?

FRANK: Yes, sir. The bracelets were meant for sailors' fists, not hands like ours (holding up a slim paw), and being well greased with hog's lard, such a hand could slip through. To my relief; for hammer and chisel, tho' I carried them about me, could not but prove noisier even than Mr. Boswell stirring up the ironmongery. Well, we got the fetters off, and caftan and turban on, while you, sirs, raised a dust at the ladder foot; and so Quashie passed for me long enough to slip away.

BOSWELL: What would you have done, Dr. Johnson, had the supercargo, becoming suspicious, descended the ladder again to oversee our proceedings?

JOHNSON: First tripping up his heels with my staff, sir, I should have then encumbered him with help, long enough for Quashie in Frank's caftan to make the best of his way up the ladder.

BOSWELL: Caftan? What then does Frank wear?

FRANK: A man may wear two caftans, one above the other.

BOSWELL (enlightened): But not two turbans.

"So the turban must seem lost," smiled Dr. Johnson. "Sorry I am, Frank, that I had to beat you for it."

"More convincingly," rejoined Frank, "than painfully."

"It gave us a spectacular scene to exit by," observed Dr. Johnson, "and diverted the attention of the slavers momentarily from Quashie, long enough for us to elude them. We should not care to be in their hands now."

"So I was thinking, waiting in the hold for Quashie to get well

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away," said Frank. "I knew not but I should see Jamaica and slavery again."

"Well, boy, you have done nobly."

"Why Frank?" I burst out, aggrieved. "Why not me? Why was I excluded from the scheam?"

"Your face, my dear Bozzie," replied my friend, "is a window to your mind. Had you known 'twas Quashie between the turban fringes, your demeanor would have told the world of it."

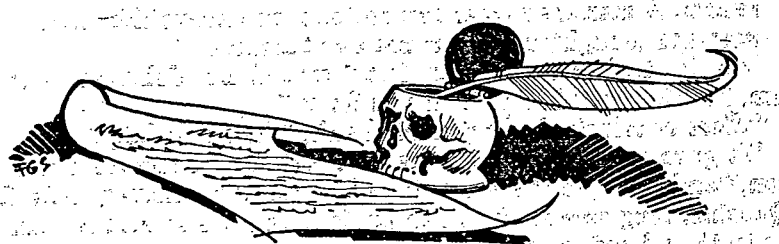
"No, sir, you wrong me," said I quietly. "Could I fail to know one from 'tother, after weeks of seeing them together? Yet when you said 'Frank,' was I to cry 'Quashie'? To what end, think you, did I clatter and clash the ironmongery so long and loud? To what end did I hold the supercargo in discourse while you sent off the black post-haste? No, sir, I have played my part, even uninstructed."

"Well done, Bozzy!" cried Dr. Johnson. "And prodigious well done, Frank! Between you, you have saved Quashie from slavery and oppression!"

Yet tho' Quashie had been rescued from the vengeful Captain, in the Court of King's Bench before Lord Mansfield, Quashie's freedom, with Somerset's, still hung in the balance. I left England in late May. Not until June did I have a jubilant communication from Dr. Sam: Johnson:

"You will rejoice to know, sir, that Somerset, and with him Quashie and all the rest, is finally free, by the noble efforts of Mr. Granville Sharp, and the judicial dictum of Lord Mansfield, who said:

"The air of England has long been too pure for a slave, and every man is free who breathes it!"



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a TOMMY and TUPPENCE story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

One of the best Tommy and Tuppence Beresford "adventures in deduction" . . . in which Tommy emulates Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner, complete with piece of string, cheesecake, and milk, and Tuppence emulates Polly Burton, adding another Baroness Orczy touch, a deduction in the manner of Lady Molly of Scotland Yard—and all in a "nine days' wonder" of a case . . .

THE SUNNINGDALE MYSTERY

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Do you know where we are going to lunch today, Tuppence?"

Mrs. Beresford considered the question. "The Ritz?" she suggested hopefully.

"Think again."

"That nice little place in Soho?"

"No." Tommy's tone was full of importance. "An A.B.C. shop. This one, in fact."

He drew her deftly inside an establishment of the kind indicated, and steered her to a corner marble-topped table.

"Excellent," said Tommy with satisfaction, as he seated himself. "Couldn't be better."

"Why has this craze for the simple life come upon you?" demanded Tuppence.

"*You see, Watson, but you do not observe.* I wonder now whether one of these haughty damsels would condescend to notice us? Splendid, she drifts this way. It is true that she appears to be thinking of something else, but doubtless her subconscious mind is functioning busily with such matters as ham and eggs and pots of tea. Chop and fried potatoes, please, Miss, and a large coffee, a roll and butter, and a plate of tongue for the lady."

The waitress repeated the order in a scornful tone, but Tuppence leaned forward sud-

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denly and interrupted her.

"No, not a chop and fried potatoes. This gentleman will have a cheese cake and a glass of milk."

"A cheese cake and a milk," said the waitress with even deeper scorn if that were possible. Still thinking of something else, she drifted away again.

"That was uncalled for," said Tommy coldly.

"But I'm right, aren't I? You are the Old Man in the Corner? Where's your piece of string?"

Tommy drew a long twisted mesh of string from his pocket and proceeded to tie a couple of knots in it.

"Complete to the smallest detail," he murmured.

"You made a small mistake in ordering your meal, though."

"Women are so literal-minded," said Tommy. "If there's one thing I hate it's milk to drink, and cheese cakes are always so yellow and bilious-looking."

"Be an artist," said Tuppence. "Watch me attack my cold tongue. Jolly good stuff, cold tongue. Now then, I'm all ready to be Miss Polly Burton. Tie a large knot and begin."

"First of all," said Tommy, "speaking in a strictly unofficial capacity, let me point out this. Business is not too brisk lately. If business does not come to us, we must go to business. Apply our minds to one of the great public mysteries of the moment. Which brings me to the point—the Sunningdale Mystery."

"Ah!" said Tuppence, with deep interest. "The Sunningdale Mystery!"

Tommy drew a crumpled piece of newspaper from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"This is the latest portrait of Captain Sessle as it appeared in the *Daily*."

"Just so," said Tuppence. "I wonder someone doesn't sue these newspapers sometimes. You can see it's a man and that's all."

"When I said the Sunningdale Mystery, I should have said the so-called Sunningdale Mystery," went on Tommy rapidly. "A mystery to the police perhaps, but not to an intelligent mind."

"Tie another knot," said Tuppence.

"I don't know how much of the case you remember," continued Tommy quietly.

"All of it," said Tuppence, "but don't let me cramp your style."

"It was just over three weeks ago," said Tommy, "that that gruesome discovery was made on the famous golf links. Two members of the Club who were enjoying an early round were

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horrified to find the body of a man lying face downwards on the seventh tee. Even before they turned him over they had guessed him to be Captain Sessle, a well-known figure on the links, who always wore a golf coat of a peculiarly bright blue color.

"Captain Sessle was often seen out on the links early in the morning, practising, and it was thought at first that he had been suddenly overcome by some form of heart disease. But examination by a doctor revealed the sinister fact that he had been murdered, stabbed in the heart with a significant object, *a woman's hatpin.* He was also found to have been dead at least twelve hours.

"That put an entirely different complexion on the matter, and very soon some interesting facts came to light. Practically the last person to see Captain Sessle alive was his friend and partner, Mr. Hollaby of the Porcupine Assurance Company, and he told his story as follows.

"Sessle and he had played a round earlier in the day. After tea Sessle suggested that they play a few more holes before it got too dark to see. Hollaby assented. Sessle seemed in good spirits and was in excellent form. There is a public footpath that crosses the links, and just as they were playing up to the sixth green Hollaby noticed a woman coming along it. She was very tall and dressed in brown, but he did not observe her particularly and he thought Sessle did not notice her at all.

"The footpath in question crosses in front of the seventh tee," continued Tommy. "The woman had passed along this and was standing at the farther side, as though waiting. Captain Sessle was the first to reach the tee, as Mr. Hollaby was replacing the flag in the hole. As the latter came towards the tee, he was astonished to see Sessle and the woman talking together. As he came nearer they both turned abruptly, Sessle calling over his shoulder, 'Shan't be a minute.'

"The two of them walked off side by side, still deep in earnest conversation. The footpath there leaves the course, and passing between two narrow hedges of neighboring gardens comes out on the road to Windlesham.

"Captain Sessle was as good as his word. He reappeared within a minute or two, much to Hollaby's satisfaction, as two other players were coming up behind them, and the light was failing rapidly. They drove, and at once Hollaby noticed that something had occurred to upset his companion. Not only did he foozle his drive badly, but

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his face was worried and his forehead was creased in a big frown. He hardly answered his companion's remarks, and his golf was atrocious. Evidently something had occurred to put him completely off his game.

"They played that hole and the eighth, and then Captain Sessle declared abruptly that the light was too bad and that he was off home. Just at that point there is another of those narrow 'slips' leading to the Windlesham road, and Captain Sessle departed that way which was a short cut to his home, a small bungalow on the road in question. The other two players came up, a Major Barnard and a Mr. Lecky, and to them Hollaby mentioned Captain Sessle's sudden change of manner. They also had seen him speaking to the woman in brown, but had not been near enough to see her face. All three men wondered what she could have said to upset their friend to that extent.

"They returned to the Clubhouse together, and as far as was known at the time, were the last people to see Captain Sessle alive. The day was a Wednesday and on Wednesdays cheap tickets to London are issued. The man and wife who ran Captain Sessle's small bungalow were up in town according to custom and did not return until the late train. They entered the bungalow as usual and supposed their master to be in his room asleep. Mrs. Sessle, his wife, was away on a visit.

"The murder of the Captain was a nine days' wonder. Nobody could suggest a motive for it. The identity of the tall woman in brown was eagerly discussed, but without result. The police were, as usual, blamed for their supineness—most unjustly as time was to show. For a week later a girl called Doris Evans was arrested and charged with the murder of Captain Anthony Sessle.

"The police had had little to work upon. A strand of fair hair caught in the dead man's fingers and a few threads of flame-colored wool caught on one of the buttons of his blue coat. Diligent inquiries had elicited the following facts.

"A young girl dressed in a flame-colored coat and skirt had arrived by train that evening about seven o'clock and had asked the way to Captain Sessle's house. The same girl had reappeared again at the station, two hours later. Her hat was awry and her hair tousled, and she seemed in a state of great agitation. She inquired about the trains back to town, and was continually looking over her shoulder as though afraid of something.

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"Our police force is in many ways very wonderful. With this slender evidence to go upon, they managed to track down the girl and identify her as one Doris Evans. She was charged with murder and cautioned that anything she might say would be used against her, but she nevertheless persisted in making a statement, and this statement she repeated again in detail, without any substantial variation, at the subsequent proceedings.

"Her story was this. She was a typist by profession, and had made friends one evening, in a cinema, with a well-dressed man who declared he had taken a fancy to her. His name, he told her, was Anthony, and he suggested that she should come down to his bungalow at Sunningdale. She had no idea then, or at any other time, that he had a wife. It was arranged between them that she should come down on the following Wednesday—the day, you will remember, when the servants would be absent and his wife away from home. In the end he told her his full name was Anthony Sessle and gave her the name of his house.

"She duly arrived at the bungalow on the evening in question and was greeted by Sessle who had just come in from the links. Though he professed himself delighted to see her, the girl declared that from the first his manner was strange and different. A half-acknowledged fear sprang up in her and she wished fervently that she had not come.

"After a simple meal which was all ready and prepared, Sessle suggested going out for a stroll. The girl consenting, he took her out of the house, down the road, and along the 'slip' onto the golf course. And then suddenly, just as they were crossing the seventh tee, he seemed to go completely mad. Drawing a revolver from his pocket, he brandished it in the air, declaring that he had come to the end of his tether.

" 'Everything must go! I'm ruined—done for. And you shall go with me. I shall shoot you first—then myself. They will find our bodies here in the morning side by side—together in death.'

"And so on—a lot more. He had hold of Doris Evans by the arm and she, realizing she had to do with a madman, made frantic efforts to free herself, or failing that to get the revolver away from him. They struggled together, and in that struggle he must have torn out a piece of her hair and got the wool of her coat entangled on a button.

"Finally, with a desperate effort, she freed herself and ran

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for her life across the golf links, expecting every minute to be shot down with a revolver bullet. She fell twice, tripping over the heather, but eventually regained the road to the station and realized that she was not being pursued.

"That is the story Doris Evans tells—and from which she has never varied. She strenuously denies that she ever struck at him with a hatpin in self-defense—a natural enough thing to do under the circumstances, though—and one which may well be the truth. In support of her story a revolver has been found in the furze bushes near where the body is lying. It had not been fired.

"Doris Evans has been sent up for trial, but the mystery still remains a mystery. If her story is to be believed, who stabbed Captain Sessle? The other woman, the tall woman in brown whose appearance so upset him? So far no one has explained her connection with the case. She appears out of space suddenly on the footpath across the links, she disappears along the slip, and no one ever hears of her again. Who was she? A local resident? A visitor from London? If so, did she come by car or by train? There is nothing remarkable about her except her height, and no one seems to be able to describe her appearance. She could not have been Doris Evans, for Doris Evans is small and fair, and moreover was only just then arriving at the station."

"The wife?" suggested Tuppence. "What about the wife?"

"A very natural suggestion. But Mrs. Sessle is also a small woman, and besides Mr. Hollaby knows her well by sight, and there seems no doubt that she was really away from home. One further development has come to light. The Porcupine Assurance Company is in liquidation. The accounts reveal the most daring misappropriation of funds. The reasons for Captain Sessle's wild words to Doris Evans are now quite apparent. For some years past he must have been systematically embezzling money. Neither Mr. Hollaby, nor his son, had any idea of what was going on. They are practically ruined.

"The case stands like this. Captain Sessle was on the verge of discovery and ruin. Suicide would be a natural solution, but the nature of the wound rules that theory out. Who killed him? Was it Doris Evans? Was it the mysterious woman in brown?"

Tommy paused, took a sip of milk, made a wry face, and bit cautiously into the cheese cake.

"*Of course,*" murmured

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Tommy, "I saw at once where the hitch in this particular case lay and just where the police were going astray."

"Yes?" said Tuppence eagerly.

Tommy shook his head.

"I wish I did, Tuppence, it's dead easy being the Old Man in the Corner up to a certain point. But the solution beats me. Who did murder the beggar? I don't know."

He took some more newspaper clippings out of his pocket.

"Further exhibits. Mr. Hollaby. His son. Mrs. Sessle. Doris Evans."

Tuppence pounced on the last and looked at it for some time.

"She didn't murder him anyway," she remarked at last. "Not with a hatpin."

"Why this certainty?"

"A Lady Molly of Scotland Yard touch. She's got bobbed hair. Only one woman in twenty uses hatpins nowadays, anyway—long hair or short. Hats fit tight and pull on—there's no need for such a thing."

"Still, she might have had one with her."

"My dear boy, we don't keep them as heirlooms! Why on earth should she have brought a hatpin down to Sunningdale?"

"Then it must have been the other woman, the woman in brown."

"I wish she hadn't been tall. Then she could have been the wife. I always suspect wives who are away at the time and so couldn't have had anything to do with it. If she found her husband carrying on with that girl it would be quite natural for her to go for him with a hatpin."

"I shall have to be careful, I see," remarked Tommy.

But Tuppence was deep in thought and refused to be drawn.

"What were the Sessles like?" she asked suddenly. "What did people say about them?"

"As far as I can make out, they were very popular. He and his wife were supposed to be devoted to one another. That's what makes the business of the girl so odd. It's the last thing you'd have expected of a man like Sessle. He was an ex-soldier, you know. Came into a good bit of money, retired, and went into this insurance business. The last man in the world, apparently, whom you would have suspected of being a crook."

"Is it absolutely certain that he was the crook? Couldn't it have been the other two who took the money?"

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"The Hollabys? They say they're ruined."

"Oh, they say! Perhaps they've got it all in a bank under another name. I put it foolishly, I daresay, but you know what I mean. Suppose they'd been speculating with the money for some time, unbeknown to Sessle, and lost it all. It might be jolly convenient for them that Sessle died just when he did."

Tommy tapped the photograph of Mr. Hollaby Senior with his fingernail.

"So you're accusing this respectable gentleman of murdering his friend and partner? You forget that he parted from Sessle on the links in full view of Barnard and Lecky and then spent the evening in the Dormy House. Besides, there's the hatpin."

"Bother the hatpin," said Tuppence impatiently. "That hatpin, you think, points to the crime having been committed by a woman?"

"Naturally. Don't you agree?"

"No. Men are notoriously old-fashioned. It takes them ages to rid themselves of preconceived ideas. They associate hatpins and hairpins with the female sex, and call them 'women's weapons.' They may have been in the past, but they're both rather out of date now. Why, I haven't had a hatpin or hairpin for the last four years."

"Then you think—?"

"That it was a *man* who killed Sessle. The hatpin was used to make it *seem* a woman's crime."

"There's something in what you say, Tuppence," said Tommy slowly. "It's extraordinary how things seem to straighten themselves out when you talk a thing over."

Tuppence nodded.

"Everything must be logical—if you look at it the right way. And remember what Marriot once said about the amateur point of view—that it had the *intimacy*. We know something about people like Captain Sessle and his wife. We know what they're likely to do—and what they're not likely to do. And we've each got our special knowledge."

Tommy smiled.

"You mean," he said, "that you are an authority on what people with bobbed and shingled heads are likely to have in their possession, and that you have an intimate acquaintance with what wives are likely to feel and do?"

"Something of the sort."

"And what about me? What is my special knowledge? Do husbands pick up girls, et cetera?"

"No," said Tuppence grave-

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ly. "You know the course—you've been on it—not as a detective searching for clues, but as a golfer. You know about golf, and what's likely to put a man off his game."

"It must have been something pretty serious to put Sessle off his game. His handicap's two, and from the seventh tee on he played like a child, so they say."

"Who say?"

"Barnard and Lecky. They were playing just behind him, you remember."

"That was after he met the woman—the tall woman in brown. They saw him speaking to her, didn't they?"

"Yes—at least—"

Tommy broke off. Tuppence looked up at him, and was puzzled. He was staring at the piece of string in his fingers, but staring with the eyes of one who sees something very different.

"Tommy, what is it?"

"Be quiet, Tuppence. I'm playing the sixth hole at Sunningdale. Sessle and old Hollaby are holing out on the sixth green ahead of me. It's getting dusk, but I can see that bright blue coat of Sessle's clearly enough. And on the footpath to the left of me there's a woman coming along. She hasn't crossed from the ladies' course—that's on the right—I should have seen her if she had done so. And it's odd I didn't see her on the footpath before—from the fifth tee, for instance."

He paused.

"You said just now I knew the course, Tuppence. Just behind the sixth tee there's a little hut or shelter. Anyone could wait in there until—the right moment came. They could change their appearance there. I mean—tell me, Tuppence, this is where your special knowledge comes in again—would it be very difficult for a man to look like a woman, then change back to being a man again? Could he wear a skirt over plus fours, for instance?"

"Certainly he could. The woman would look a bit bulky, that would be all. A longish brown skirt, say, a brown sweater of the kind both men and women wear, and a woman's felt hat with a bunch of side curls attached each side. That would be all that was needed—I'm speaking, of course, of what would pass at a distance, which I take to be what you are driving at. Switch off the skirt, take off the hat and curls, and put on a man's cap which you can carry rolled up in your hand, and there you'd be—back as a man again."

"And the time required for the transformation?"

"From woman to man, a

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minute and a half at the outside, probably less. The other way about would take longer—you'd have to arrange the hat and curls a bit, and the skirt would stick getting it on over the plus fours."

"That doesn't worry me. It's the time for the first that matters. As I tell you, I'm playing the sixth hole. The woman in brown has reached the seventh tee now. She crosses it and waits. Sessle in his blue coat goes towards her. They stand together a minute, then they follow the path round the trees out of sight. Hollaby is on the tee alone. Two or three minutes pass. The man in the blue coat comes back and drives, foozling badly. The light's getting worse. I and my partner go on. Ahead of us are those two, Sessle slicing and topping and doing everything he shouldn't do. At the eighth green I see him stride off and vanish down the slip. What happened to him to make him play like a different man?"

"The woman in brown—or the man, if you think it was a man."

"Exactly, and where they were standing—out of sight, remember, of those coming after them—there's a deep tangle of furze bushes. You could thrust a body in there and it would be pretty certain to lie hidden until the morning."

"Tommy! You think it was *then*—but someone would have heard—"

"Heard what? The doctors agreed death must have been instantaneous. I've seen men killed instantaneously in the war. They don't cry out as a rule—just a gurgle or a moan—perhaps just a sigh or a funny little cough. Sessle comes towards the seventh tee, and the woman comes forward and speaks to him. He recognizes her perhaps, as a man he knows masquerading as a woman. Curious to learn the why and wherefore, he allows himself to be drawn along the footpath out of sight. One stab with the deadly hatpin as they walk along. Sessle falls—dead. The other man drags his body into the furze bushes, strips off the blue coat, then sheds his own skirt and the hat and curls. He puts on Sessle's well-known blue coat and cap, strides back to the tee. Three minutes would do it. The others behind can't see his face, only the peculiar blue coat they know so well. They never doubt that it's Sessle—*but he doesn't play Sessle's brand of golf.* They all say he played like a different man. Of course he did. He *was* a different man."

"But—"

"Point Number Two. His action in bringing the girl down

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there was the action of *a different man.* It wasn't Sessle who met Doris Evans at a cinema and induced her to come down to Sunningdale. It was a man *calling* himself Sessle. Remember, Doris Evans wasn't arrested until a fortnight after the crime. *She never saw the body.* If she had, she might have bewildered everyone by declaring that wasn't the man who took her out on the golf links that night and spoke so wildly of suicide.

"It was a carefully laid plot. The girl invited down for Wednesday when Sessle's house would be empty, then the hatpin which pointed to its being a woman who did it. The murderer meets the girl, takes her into the bungalow and gives her supper, then takes her out on the links and when he gets to the scene of the crime, brandishes his revolver and scares the life out of her. Once she has taken to her heels all he has to do is to pull out the body and leave it lying on the tee. The revolver he chucks into the bushes. Then he makes a neat parcel of the skirt and hat and—now I admit I'm guessing—in all probability walks to Woking which is only about six miles away, and goes back to town from there."

"Wait a minute," said Tuppence. "There's one thing you haven't explained. What about Hollaby?"

"Hollaby?"

"Yes. I admit that the people behind couldn't have seen whether it was really Sessle or not. But you can't tell me that the man who was playing with him was so hypnotized by the blue coat that he never looked at his face."

"My dear old thing," said Tommy. "That's just the point. Hollaby knew all right. You see, I'm adopting your theory—that Hollaby and his son were the real embezzlers. The murderer's got to be a man who knew Sessle pretty well—knew, for instance, about the servants being always out on a Wednesday, and that his wife was away. And also someone who was able to get an impression of Sessle's key. I think Hollaby Junior would fulfill all these requirements. He's about the same age and height as Sessle, and they were both clean-shaven men. Doris Evans probably saw several photographs of the murdered man reproduced in the papers, but as you yourself observed, one can just see it's a man and that's about all."

"Didn't she ever see Hollaby in court?"

"The son never appeared in the case at all. Why should he? He had no evidence to give. It was old Hollaby, with his irreproachable alibi, who stood in the limelight throughout. No-

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body has even bothered to inquire what the son was doing that particular evening."

"It all fits in," admitted Tuppence. She paused a minute, then asked, "Are you going to tell all this to the police?"

"I don't know if they'd listen."

"They'd listen all right," said an unexpected voice behind him.

Tommy swung round to confront Inspector Marriot. The Inspector was sitting at the next table. In front of him was a poached egg.

"Often drop in here to lunch," said Inspector Marriot. "As I was saying, we'll listen all right—in fact, I've been listening. I don't mind telling you that we've not been quite satisfied all along over those Porcupine figures. You see, we've had our suspicions of those Hollabys. But nothing to go on. Too sharp for us. Then this murder came, and that seemed to upset all our ideas. But thanks to you and the lady, sir, we'll confront young Hollaby and Doris Evans and see if she recognizes him. I rather fancy she will. That's a very ingenious idea of yours about the blue coat. I'll see that Blunt's Brilliant Detectives get the credit."

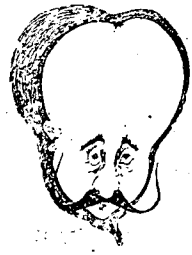
"You *are* a nice man, Inspector Marriot," said Tuppence gratefully.

"We think a lot of you two at the Yard," replied that stolid gentleman. "You'd be surprised. If I may ask you, sir, what's the meaning of that piece of string?"

"Nothing," said Tommy, stuffing it into his pocket. "A bad habit of mine. As to the cheese cake and the milk—I'm on a diet. Nervous dyspepsia. Busy men are always martyrs to it."

"Ah!" said the detective. "I thought perhaps you'd been reading—well, it's of no consequence."

But the Inspector's eyes twinkled.



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a *NEW* detective character by

EDWARD WELLEN

It doesn't seem possible, after more than a century of detective-story writing, after literally hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of novels, novelets, and short stories have been written about imagined detectives, that someone could come up with a new type of crimebuster. But Edward Wellen has—that is, to the best of our fallible memory, we have never read a story about this particular species of sleuth.

Historically speaking, Mr. Wellen's detective is "The Corrector of Destinies" rather than "The Man of Last Resort"; but generically speaking, he is both. . .

And now we will let you discover the new 'tec type for yourself. . .

THE CORRECTOR OF DESTINIES

by EDWARD WELLEN

I stuck my finger in the law book to hold my place and raised my head and then an eyebrow. It was Number 10805. He still had the polished politeness of outside, still carried his station in life with him.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you, but this is the first chance—"

I sighed inside but worked up a smile and said, "Not at all. Sit down, sit down." I had to get over that habit of repeating myself. Unless the man bounced on sitting down, one "sit down" was enough. "What's on your mind?"

His case was on his mind, of course. Every prisoner always had his own case on his mind. He leaned forward and told me about it.

"I managed a branch of a big brokerage firm. This night I was staying late at the office, catching up on paperwork. About eight o'clock a man wearing some kind of bank messenger's uniform

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came in and pointed a gun at me." He smiled. "My wife had me on the phone at the time, complaining about my not coming home, and when I saw that gun pointing at me the phone fell from between my cheek and my shoulder. I remember the receiver swinging back and forth and her voice fading in and out saying, 'Lamont, are you listening? Lamont, what's wrong?'

"The man waved me away from my desk and picked up the dangling phone and said, 'Sorry, honey. He's busy right now.' And he hung up. He was wearing gloves, so I figured him for a professional. He certainly knew what he was after. He had me unlock the cage and we went in and he helped himself to $2,000,000 worth of bearer bonds. He taped my hands together behind my back, sat me down on the floor, then taped my feet together.

"That's how they found me an hour later when my wife got worried enough or mad enough to phone the cops after getting no answer to her calls. They never found the man and they never got the bonds back."

He leaned nearer. "Now here's the thing that gets me." He looked more bewildered than bitter, as though he still didn't know what had hit him. "The man got past the building's night-security man by showing a note from me on one of my noteheads that said to let him in. The note was in my handwriting, which is distinctive enough for Pat, the building's night-security man, to recognize, but the trouble is I never wrote it."

I took that in, then shook my head. "No, the trouble is the note was in your handwriting."

His mouth was a twist of lemon. "Yes, the note was in my handwriting, though I tell you again I didn't write it. Pat had kept it and they had that as evidence against me. They said the note was just a cover. They said the whole thing was an inside job, that I was in with the Mob."

"Were you?"

He didn't get mad. "Hell, no. I admit I liked to gamble now and then—and what's the stock market but the biggest gamble of all? —and I did lose some money in Las Vegas, though not as much as they said I did."

"They brought that out at your trial?"

"If they could've, they would've brought out a candy bar I stole when I was six." Now he looked more bitter than bewildered. "The prosecutor tried to make all kinds of deals with

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me. But I had nothing to bargain with. I had never seen the stickup man before, still don't know who he was. I couldn't return all or any of the two million dollars. The bonding company didn't believe me. My firm didn't believe me. They leaned on the prosecutor, but I don't think they had to lean hard. He threw the book at me. And the jury bound it in leather and the judge stamped it in gold."

I decided I liked the man. Whether or not he was conning me, he still held onto his sense of humor about himself and the fix he was in. But the first hundred years were the hardest, and he had a long way yet to go. Unless I could help him.

"That's it then? You got a bum rap and you want to get out?"

"Of course I want to get out. I hate having to pay for someone else's crime. True, I don't have much to go back to—my wife left me—but I do have my name to clear."

I looked at him. Was that true? Or did he have his share of $2,000,000 to go back to? I guess I stared, but his eyes met mine without wavering.

But that doesn't mean a thing. A good con man can outstare and out-honest-countenance a saint.

I liked what I saw of him, but the one thing I can't stand is to have someone con me. But I could judge him only on the basis of my instincts. My deliberation was brief: I quickly brought in my verdict: the man was sincere.

He seemed to sense that I had committed myself, for he relaxed a bit. But the sweat of the brow was just beginning for me.

If he hadn't been in on the pulling of the job, how explain the note? The court had bought it as a stupid and clumsy way of getting the accomplice in. But Number 10805 seemed neither stupid nor clumsy.

He seemed bright, and bright people make the best subjects. I took my finger out of the law book and wagged it like a metronome.

"Now look here, follow this closely, I want you to concentrate, this is a very heavy matter we're dealing with. . ."

He followed my finger with growing puzzlement as I intoned slowly and soothingly. Then he snapped his gaze from my finger and laughed. He shook his head.

"You want to see if someone could've hypnotized me into writing that note. The answer's no." He took a deep breath and elaborated on it. "A few years ago I went to a dentist who

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specializes in using hypnosis to calm patients with an unreasonable but real fear of the dentist's chair. He tried to put me under. He just couldn't. Something in me puts up too much resistance to going under. So I had to go back to the Novacaine injections which leave my gums sore and puff up my face."

"So you didn't write the note consciously or unconsciously. But you say the note's genuine. How genuine?"

"The prosecution brought in handwriting experts to prove under great magnification that the note was in my handwriting."

"Come on now, don't tell me you didn't have your own handwriting expert."

"I did. And he got on the stand and said pretty smugly that the note wasn't in my handwriting. But he crumpled under cross-examination. I could tell the jury didn't believe him. Even I didn't believe him. He only made my case worse."

I felt his eyes on me as I looked around at the shelves and shelves of law volumes. In my time I had thumbed through them all. Something in them should offer Number 10805 an out. No; legal ploys would have to wait till we had sorted out the truth about that note. There was no way of getting around it. We had to face it.

The whole thing of the note smelled fishy. I swiveled to meet his gaze and shot the question at him as it surfaced in my mind.

"Why didn't the building's night-security man—Pat?—phone up to you to confirm the note?"

"Pat said he tried to, but couldn't get me. As I told you, my wife was on the line at the time. The office switchboard was off and only my phone was working. So Pat gave up, shrugged at the irregularity, and let the man in. He was certain it was my handwriting—or at least my signature."

I struck quickly at the opening. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's been puzzling me where anyone could have got samples of my handwriting. Of my signature yes, but not of my handwriting. I dictate—dictated—all my correspondence, and typed whatever notes I made—I can hunt and peck with the best."

I frowned. Then I smoothed my brow, making it a *tabula rasa* for the new thought I felt coming. "What did the note say? Can you remember the exact wording?"

"Can I?" He smiled grimly. "It's burned into my brain. The exact words were, 'Pat, Let delivery man in,' and then my signature."

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I turned my pad to a fresh sheet and printed: Pat, Let delivery man in.

"That right?"

He craned to see, and nodded.

"Good," I said. "Now let's alphabetize it."

I put the letters into alphabetical order.

a a d e e e i i L l m n n P r t t v y

I looked at Number 10805. "What's your full name?"

For a moment Number 10805 gave the appearance of having forgotten it. Then he got it out. "Lamont van der Pleyster."

I set that down and he nodded that I had it right. "Good," I said. "Now let's alphabetize that." I put the letters of his name into alphabetical order.

a a d e e e L l m n n o P r r s t t v y

"See the likeness? Except for the 'i' there's not a letter in the note, capitalized or uncapitalized, that isn't in your signature. All a guy'd need are two samples of your signature. One he'd use as is, to sign the note. The other, which would be necessary to get the slight variety that's natural, he'd snip into its separate letters. Then he'd juggle the snippets to form the note, Scotch-tape them in place, put a blank piece of your notehead on top, and trace the words, using either a light box or a window on a bright day. Result, an almost perfect forgery."

He hammered his fist on the library table. I turned quickly to shake my head at the guard standing by the door and the guard went back to doing nothing.

"Sorry," Lamont van der Pleyster said. "But it hit me how right you are. Something about the wording always bothered me. Now I know what it is. If I had written the note, I wouldn't've said 'delivery man.' I would've said 'bank messenger.' But there is no 'b' or 'k' or 'g' in my name, and I guess an 'i' is the easiest letter to imitate."

"True, true," I said, suddenly weary for no reason. I spoke briskly to wind it up. "Tomorrow or the next day I'll fix you up with a writ of *coram nobis*—a writ of review based on an alleged error of fact. When the handwriting experts take another and closer look at those 'i's' in the note placed in evidence, the fact of forgery should become plain. And you'll have your chance to show the court how someone framed you and got you sent up."

His face had taken on a look of release. I tried to hide my pity. I had a hunch about the someone who framed him.

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His wife and the "delivery man" had to be in it together. Two things pointed to it: her well-timed phone call that prevented Pat from confirming the note and her easy access to his signature and notehead.

His former wife, I should say. She'd left him. And that should help the case resolve itself. His lawyer through private investigators, or the law on its own, would either find his former wife and the delivery man living together somewhere or find that the pair had split up. If the man was still with her, he should be a cinch for Pat to identify. If he had tired of her in the meanwhile and ditched her, she might be more than willing to finger the man when they caught up with her.

All that went through my head while he heaped me with thanks. "Sure, sure," I said casually, because all the expressions of gratitude and the promises to remember me that have bent my ear over the years add up to a garden full of withered forget-me-nots.

I glanced at the wall clock and got up, saying, "Time to get back to my gardening. See you later." I shelved the law volume and made for the door. While nodding at the guard I glanced caressingly at the books lining the walls of the prison law library and told myself for the ten-thousandth time that one day I would find the key to my own case—the key that would get me out.

I nodded left and right to the cons in the yard as I crossed to my rosebushes in the shop building's L. All but one or two, and they were new fish, gave me a nod back or a good word.

But I knew what they said about me—that the old lifer could help everyone but himself, that deep down he really didn't want out, that he had become too institutionalized to face the outside world as a free man.

I smiled at the cons but I was really smiling to myself. They did not know that, no matter how my own case turned out in the end, they, by coming to me to resolve their legal problems, were in a way helping me escape.

"Q"

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a *NEW* L-and-L con-men story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

They're back — Lovell the painter and Lang the salesman, and as rascally a pair of rogues as ever specialized in art frauds and raised the con game to the level of fine art. This time it's "Fragonard's" Landscape in Blue, with a reserve bid to protect — who?

HOBSON'S CHOICE

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

The auction of "fine paintings and objets d'art" was almost over by the time I got to Hobson's Gallery—which, since I hadn't come to buy, didn't really bother me. What could pose something of a problem, though, was the small tastefully lettered sign hanging from a velvet rope stretched across the entrance to the auction room: *Private–Admittance by Invitation Only.* Because, of course, I hadn't been invited.

Still, there was no guard there to enforce the ban. So I simply unhooked the rope and went through.

Just inside, a girl wearing a smock-type jacket and clutching a handful of catalogues schoolgirl style under her bosom started away from the wall and opened her mouth to protest. I shushed her with a finger to my lips, then nodded forward to where the auction was in progress.

The girl hesitated, then acquiesced with a shrug as I slipped on past her and took the nearest empty seat.

The room was set up like an auditorium, with rows of folding chairs split by an aisle down the middle facing a raised platform at the far end of the room. Most of the chairs were occupied, which since it was a large room and the chairs set close together made for more than a fair-sized crowd. Hobson himself stood behind a lectern at the right-hand end of the platform.

He was a tall distinguished man with a long aristocratic face which he emphasized by

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brushing his silvering hair back from the forehead and temples in a straight pompadour. Beside him on an easel rested the painting he was currently engaged in auctioning. It was a medium-sized landscape done mostly in reds and greens, and from Lovell's previous description I had no difficulty identifying it as a Fragonard, with a value anywhere between $12,000 and $18,000 depending on how badly someone wanted it and how skillfully Hobson could play on that desire. And by all accounts, he was very skillful—which was what I had come to check out for myself.

Now, for just a moment, his eyes rested on me, shadowed by a flicker of annoyance. Then they moved on to rove over the audience once again. "I have a bid of $7000," he said, his voice quiet but carrying well. "Do I have 7500?"

No one in the audience spoke, but there was a ripple of anticipation and after a few moments Hobson nodded and said, "$7500 is bid." His eyes searched for more signals. "Do I have 8000?"

He got it quickly and then went on from there: 8500, 9000, 9500. After a while I lost interest in Hobson and joined the rest of the crowd in trying to spot the bidders. One was fairly obvious—a stocky, gray-haired man in a rumpled blue suit about halfway down on the aisle. He slouched expressionlessly in his chair, signaling his bids by a dip of an old-fashioned wooden pencil that he held upright on top of his crossed knees.

For a while I had one other spotted too, but he dropped out of the contest early. And the others must either have been hidden by the press of people or their signals were considerably more subtle, because I had no luck locating them at all.

When the bidding reached $15,000, Hobson paused to take a sip of water from the carafe on his lectern, then looked out over the room again. "I acknowledge the bid of 15,5 reported by my assistant in the rear of the room," he said. "Do I have 16?"

My eyes, along with a good many others, swiveled over to the man in the rumpled blue suit, because the $15,000 bid had been his and he had responded to every other challenge by upping his bid. But this time the pencil continued to point unmovingly toward the ceiling.

If this surprised Hobson, he didn't show it by as much as a flicker of an eyebrow. "Do I have $16,000?" he said. "No?" He picked up a gavel and rapped the lectern sharply. "Once

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at $15,500," he said. "Twice—"

He broke off, frowning, then took a deep breath and made a quick movement with his head and shoulders as if composing himself. "Please accept my apologies, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "but my assistant has just signaled me that she was mistaken about the 15,5 bid." Hobson glared back at the hapless assistant. "The proper bid," he said tightly, "is $15,000. Let us proceed from there."

He paused for a second, then said, "Do I have 15,5? No?" He rapped sharply with the gavel again. "Then once at $15,000, twice at $15,000—sold to Mr. Tate for $15,000."

Hobson smiled then and nodded toward the man in the rumpled blue suit, who permitted himself a curt nod in acknowledgement and then very deliberately put his pencil away in his inside pocket.

According to the catalogue, there were two more paintings to be disposed of, but they were lesser items and Hobson delegated the task to one of his assistants and left. I'd seen all I'd needed. So I left too, following him back to his private office.

The thin blonde at the typist's desk outside his door gave me a sad smile. "I'm sorry," she said. "But Mr. Hobson gave definite instructions that he wasn't to be disturbed."

I smiled back. "I think he'll change his mind," I said, "when you tell him the man who bid $15,500 for the Fragonard is here."

She looked at me dubiously but finally rose, rapped on the door, and went inside, closing it after her. A moment later she was back, looking genuinely surprised. "He says you're to go right in."

Hobson received me standing behind his desk and glaring down his patrician nose. "Now just what is this nonsense?" he demanded as soon as the door had closed behind me. "You know as well as I do that there was no 15,5 bid on the Fragonard."

"That's right," I said equably. "But more importantly, there was no mistake by your assistant either. You simply announced a false bid to see if you couldn't jack the price up. And when it didn't work, you passed the buck to the most likely candidate."

All the bluster left Hobson's manner. "If this is a shakedown—" he began ominously.

I shook my head. "Just the opposite," I said. "I'm going to pay you money."

Hobson's eyes narrowed and he regarded me soberly for a

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long minute. "I don't believe I caught your name," he said at last.

"Lang," I said. "Harry Lang."

"And what is it you're going to pay me for, Mr. Lang?"

"It's rather complicated to explain," I said. "May I sit down?"

"Oh, please do," Hobson said drily. He waved his hand expansively to indicate any of the several clients' chairs scattered around the room, waited until I had picked one out, then sat down himself behind the desk. "All right, Mr. Lang," he said. "I'm all ears."

I leaned back and crossed my legs. "As I understand it," I said, "anyone offering a painting for sale at auction can specify a minimum price for it to be sold at."

"That's correct," Hobson said. "We call it a reserve price. If it's met or exceeded, the painting is sold. Otherwise, it's returned to the owner." He shrugged. "It's not an uncommon practice in any auction."

"No," I said. "What is uncommon, though, is that at an art auction the reserve price is never announced. In fact, the usual practice is for the auctioneer to start the bidding considerably below it and through use of shills or signals visible only to him build up to the reserve."

Hobson shrugged again. "So," he said, "what of it? Sometimes these little tricks are necessary to stimulate interest. But they're not illegal—or even unethical—since the painting wouldn't sell for less than the reserve in any case." He paused and fixed me with his eyes. "And now may I ask what all this is leading up to?"

"I thought that was obvious," I said. "I have a painting—a Fragonard landscape similar to the one you sold today, only from his 'blue' period—that I want to put up for auction. And I want to set a reserve of $20,000."

Hobson was silent for another long moment. Then he said slowly, "You saw what the Fragonard went for this afternoon, Mr. Lang. And I might add that the legitimate cross bidding ended at $12,000. So it wasn't merely a case of Tate seeing through my game and calling my bluff. $15,000 *was* his top price. And it's not out of line with what others would pay. All of which means, I'm afraid, that if you set a reserve of $20,000 your Fragonard would in all likelihood be returned unsold and you would have accomplished nothing."

"Not quite," I murmured. "Because the way the reserve system works, the published records of the auction would show

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only that the painting was knocked down for $20,000."

"Aha," Hobson said with satisfaction. "I knew there had to be more to it than met the eye. So what you really want is not a sale but the *record* of a sale."

"Right on the nose, Mr. Hobson," I said. "That's exactly what I want." I uncrossed my legs and leaned forward. "I'm going to be perfectly frank because I don't want any misunderstanding about what I'm trying to do or how you fit in cropping up later to spoil the deal."

Hobson nodded slowly. "I think I understand," he said. "What you have in mind isn't quite legal."

"Well, I suppose that depends on how you define 'legal'," I said. "But in any case, for the past several years I've worked partners with a man named Lovell. Now, Lovell has his little peculiarities. He's a real nut about the kind of food he lets himself eat and is as nervous as a cat in a roomful of fox terriers. But on the plus side he has a very large if somewhat specialized talent. He can forge a painting by an artist living or dead and do it so well that only a spectroscopic or electroluminescent examination can distinguish his copy from the artist's genuine work.

"I handle the outside end—the selling. Which isn't as easy as it may seem. Because you can't just walk up to someone and say, 'Hey, look, I've got this Old Master for sale,' unless, of course, you're prepared to answer a lot of questions about where and how you got it—and back up the answers with some sort of documentation.

"Up to now we've gotten around this by copying existing paintings and passing them off to unscrupulous collectors as stolen or otherwise illegally obtained. There are a couple of disadvantages to this, though. One, there aren't so many collectors of that kind around and for obvious reasons we have to be careful about repeat business. Two, we have to deal at bargain-basement rates. Sold under the counter, our Fragonard would bring at the most $5000, roughly one-third of what we'd get if we could sell it openly.

"What we need then is a means of 'legitimatizing' our paintings. And for that the reserve price seems made to order."

"So it does," Hobson said. "The question is, though, why should I agree to go along with your scheme?"

"Because," I said simply, "I'll pay you $1000 just to go

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through the motions of auctioning off a painting."

Hobson thought for a moment. "Make it $2000," he said, "and you have a deal. Assuming, of course," he added, as I nodded agreement, "that the painting is as good as you say. When can I see it?"

"As soon as it's finished," I said. "In about two weeks."

"In that case I'll look forward to seeing you then." He spread his hands to indicate the papers on his desk. "And now if you'll excuse me—"

"Of course," I said and rose to let myself out.

Exactly two weeks later I was back with the completed painting carried for safety's sake in a rigid-sided suitcase which I set confidently before Hobson at his desk. He hesitated a few moments, then opened it and looked inside. After another moment he lifted the painting out and carried it to the window where the light was better and went over it with a magnifying glass, square inch by square inch. Finally he put both glass and painting down.

"If I didn't know better," he said, "I'd swear this was the real thing."

"I told you Lovell was good," I said.

"So you did," Hobson said. "Only now I believe you." He came back to his desk, took a sheaf of blue-backed papers from the top drawer, and handed them to me. "You'll have to sign these," he said.

"What are they?"

"Just a standard contract. For my protection in case something goes wrong. For yours, too." He smiled easily. "To prevent me from stealing your painting before the auction. Not that anything like that would enter my mind, of course."

"Of course not," I said, signing. But I kept my copy of the papers.

Once the papers were signed, Hobson's usual routine took over, and six weeks later Lovell's Fragonard was offered at his scheduled auction.

The same smock-clad girl was on duty at the entrance, passing out catalogues to those who didn't already have them. She frowned slightly when she saw me, as if remembering how I'd crashed the gate before. But this time I had an invitation to show her and once again the frown gave way to an acquiescent shrug. I winked at her to show her I remembered too, then went on in to slip into a seat in the back row.

Shortly after I was settled, the high bidder from the previous auction, Mr. Tate, marched

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in and took his accustomed aisle seat and stared ahead as espressionlessly as before. And gradually the room filled up around us.

Hobson himself didn't show up until some fifteen minutes after the announced starting time. "Sorry to be late," he said, taking his place behind the lectern on the raised platform. "But I was delayed by the arrival of a distinguished visitor from the Municipal Museum of St. Louis, Dr. Morton Whitsett."

Hobson smiled and nodded in the direction of a tall harried-looking man who'd come in with him and was now in the process of easing himself into one of the few remaining seats.

"Dr. Whitsett and I have corresponded but this is his first visit here. Good to have you with us, Doctor," Hobson added. "Just how good, though, will depend of course on how much you buy."

He flashed another smile to show it was all in good sport and drew an appreciative laugh from his audience. The man to whom it had been directed just bobbed his head once quickly and squirmed down to make himself as inconspicuous as possible.

"And now," Hobson said, still in high good humor, "shall we proceed with business?"

The first item offered was a matched set of Eighteenth Century candlesticks in chased silver. There wasn't much interest in them and they were disposed of quickly. So was the second item—a poster-sized modern painting, all electric blues and yellows.

The third offering was Lovell's Fragonard.

"And now a real prize," Hobson said as his assistants set it up on its easel beside him. "Catalog Item Number Three, Landscape in Blue by Louis Pierre Fragonard. Note the careful attention to detail in the foreground and also the curious way in which the blue of the lake and sky seem to merge and yet still retain their individuality at the horizon line."

He paused to allow everyone time to admire both the painting and his cleverness in describing it, then said, "Shall we start the bidding at $5000 and follow our usual rule that bids must increase in multiples of $500?" He paused again and let his eyes wander over the audience. From where I sat there wasn't a discernible movement anywhere, but after a moment or two Hobson said, "Ah, thank you. I have $5000. Do I have 5500?"

Of course, it was only a matter of seconds before he had

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$5500 and then $6000 and so on as he ran the bidding up with consummate skill.

When he reached $20,000 Hobson paused for a drink from the carafe on his lectern —which he would never had done in a real auction since it would break up the rhythm of bid and counterbid. But in the present case, of course, it didn't make any difference, and otherwise his performance was flawless, right down to the final knockdown to me at $20,000.

I complimented him when I stopped by his office afterward to pick up the painting.

He had been admiring the Fragonard when I came in, having placed it on an easel by the window where the light would fall on it to best advantage. Now he sighed and turned to face me.

"It's very kind of you to say that, Mr. Lang," he said. "However, I'm afraid it wasn't all an act on my part. You see, as it turned out, there actually was a bidder for your painting. And he was willing to go as high as $19,500."

"Nineteen—" I began. "For God's sakes, who was it? Tate? That doctor from St. Louis?"

Hobson raised an eyebrow and looked at me coolly. "Does it really matter?" he said. "You couldn't sell to him in any case. He obviously won't match your price. And if you immediately offer to sell for less than you ostensibly paid, you'll really stir up questions. On the other hand—" Hobson smiled faintly and let his voice trail off.

"Go on," I said. "On the other hand?"

"On the other hand," he picked up smoothly, "*I* could simply announce that you had reneged on your $20,000 bid. It's not uncommon; people do get carried away at auctions and find afterwards that they can't honor their commitments. In which case, the next highest bid stands. So your Fragonard would automatically revert to the $19,500 bidder.

"But," Hobson added harshly, "*I'm* the only one who can do that. Just as only I have the reputation and standing to give the painting a believable provenance. But, of course, before I'd even consider it, it would have to be worth my while."

"How much?" I said.

Hobson waved a hand airily. "I'm not greedy," he said. "Shall we say one-third? $6500?"

I considered for a minute, then said, "All right. The balance is less than I'd anticipated, but I guess $13,000 in the hand is better than $16,000 or $17,000 in the bush a year or so from now."

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"I knew you'd see it that way," Hobson said. "That's why I had the money ready." He handed me an unsealed envelope. "I assumed you'd prefer cash."

"You assumed correctly," I said, riffling through the bills for a fast count. When I finished, I frowned. "There's only $11,000 here," I said.

Hobson gave me a wide-eyed stare. "Surely you haven't forgotten my $2000 fee for conducting the auction, have you? It's common practice to deduct—"

"Hobson—" I began angrily.

"If you don't like the deal, Lang," he interrupted harshly, "I'll give you your painting back and you can find your own buyer. Of course, you should bear in mind that news travels fast and a few judiciously leaked facts could leave you with nothing but a worthless piece of junk."

"You don't give me much choice, do you?" I said.

"A Hobson's choice, if you like," Hobson said, "which is none at all really. But look at it this way. You had to meet somebody smarter sometime, and you *are* making twice as much as if you'd sold the Fragonard under the counter."

"So I am," I said, and put the envelope with the $11,000 in my jacket pocket.

"Good," Hobson said. "And now I do have things to do. So—" He let his voice trail off expectantly.

"Sure," I said and left.

His secretary flashed me a smile as I came out, but I strode past her, ignoring it. Once I was outside, though, and about half a block away I began to grin. People turned to stare, but I couldn't stop. Because I was wondering how smart Hobson would feel when he found his $19,500 bidder—the man he'd known as Dr. Whitsett—had disappeared. Because, of course, "Dr. Whitsett" was Lovell.

"Q"

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introducing a *NEW* detective by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Edward D. Hoch has more series detectives appearing regularly in EQMM than any of our other contributors. From month to month you read the adventures, exploits, and escapades of thief-detective Nick Velvet, Double-C counterspy-sleuth Rand, procedural-minded Captain Leopold, Interpol investigators Sebastian Blue and Laura Charme, and con-man Ulysses S. Byrd. And now Mr. Hoch offers a new series detective, completely different from the others — the Lollipop Cop, a good-will policeman whose public-relations duties take him to the city's schools. But crime knows no distinctions of place — unfortunately it shows its face everywhere. . .

THE LOLLIPOP COP

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Paul Tower came back on duty three days after the funeral and he was immediately aware of the mood of quiet sympathy that pervaded the second floor of police headquarters. They had taken him off his regular patrol duty following the accident, and when he reported to the command sergeant for assignment the gray-haired man said simply, "I'm sorry, kid. It was a terrible blow."

"Yeah, thanks." Paul shifted uneasily, uncomfortable both at the expression of sympathy and at still being called "kid." Even though he was 28 years old, with a wife and five-year-old son dead in an auto accident, he was still "kid" to the gray-haired sergeant.

"Look, the lieutenant wants to see you about a special assignment."

"Oh?"

"He's in his office now."

Paul entered the room behind the frosted glass partition and found Lieutenant Gavin at his desk. "Hello, Tower. Awfully sorry about your wife and son. A terrible accident."

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"Thank you, sir."

"I know it's a great blow to a man to lose his family like that. You probably don't feel much like going back on patrol right away."

"I'm ready for duty, sir."

Lieutenant Gavin sighed and leaned back in his chair. "I think you need a couple of months on light duty, Tower. Till you get adjusted to this. How would you like to be the Lollipop Cop for the rest of the school year?"

"Me, sir?" The Lollipop Cop was a police officer who toured the city's grammar schools, talking to the children, passing out lollipops to the smaller ones, and generally trying to present a friendly image of the neighborhood cop. The public relations program had worked well in a number of medium-sized cities, where the Lollipop Cop sometimes went by the name of Officer Friendly or Sergeant Smiles. In the past the task had usually been assigned to an older man, someone close to retirement age who needed an easy job after too many years of walking a beat or riding a patrol car. It had never gone to anyone as young as Paul.

"I think you'd be good at it, Tower. You know how to handle kids."

Paul shook his head. "I don't think I could do it, sir. It's too soon after Mary and little Eddie."

"That's exactly why you should do it! Sergeant Martain has retired and we need someone to fill out these last two months of the school year."

Paul shook his head. "Not me, sir. Please — I want to go back on patrol."

"At least give it a try. For a week. If it doesn't work out, see me next Monday and I'll work out something else." He dropped his eyes to the papers on the desk, signifying that the conversation was at an end.

Paul Tower stood for a moment in silence. Then he said, "All right, sir," and left the office.

The first days went easily, better than he'd have thought possible. The smaller kids — the boys especially — reminded him of his dead son, but they responded to him with such real friendliness that somehow it made the tour of duty worthwhile. He smiled and talked and laughed with them, warned them about crossing streets and accepting rides from strangers, and even passed out the lollipops which were the trademark of the assignment.

"You said not to take candy from strangers," one blonde seven-year-old girl told him on

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the third day, disdaining the lollipop. "And you're a stranger!"

He tried to explain that police officers aren't strangers, but he was glad to escape into the higher grades where lollipops were "too young" and he was more often simply "Officer Paul."

It was on Thursday, the fourth day of his duty as the Lollipop Cop, that he spoke to the children at school 37 and met Nurse Angie Dean for the first time. She was young and fresh-faced, with long dark hair and a wide mouth that seemed always about to break into a grin. He first noticed her standing in the rear of the school basement, in the large room that served variously as gymnasium, auditorium, assembly hall, and lunchroom, while he spoke to six lower-grade classes.

When he'd finished, and distributed the traditional lollipops to the noisy kids, she walked over to him and said, "You're new at this, aren't you?"

He answered her grin with one of his own. "How could you tell?"

"You're the first cop I ever saw who was nervous in front of an audience of first and second graders."

"It's just temporary duty. I guess I'm more at ease in a patrol car."

"I'm Angie Dean, the school nurse."

"I could tell," he said, admiring her trim white uniform which stopped high enough to show most of her long legs in matching white stockings. "Officer Paul Tower, the Lollipop Cop."

"Do you have one for me?"

He realized he was still holding a few of the lollipops. "Oh, sure! Help yourself."

"Thanks." She chose an orange one and started to unwrap it. "Now, could I ask you another favor?"

"I guess so. What is it?"

"There's a fourth-grade boy who's being roughed up and robbed by some older boys. I wonder if you can help him."

"Sure, I'll try. Who are the boys causing the trouble?"

"They're at Wilson High School a few blocks from here. The Wilson students are rehearsing for their spring play, a production of *The King and I.* They needed a younger boy for the part of Louis, Anna's son, and they chose Tommy McDonald. He's been walking over to Wilson every day for rehearsals, and yesterday afternoon a group of high-school boys jumped him. They took the money from his pockets and then they punched him. He's

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got a couple of dandy bruises."

"Were the police called?"

Angie Dean shook her head. "You know how boys are. He didn't want his father to know what happened. He told his parents he was just fooling around. His father's a burly-looking man who owns a small print shop in the neighborhood — not the sort who'd like to see his son bullied. But Tommy's teacher sent him to me this morning and I got the truth out of him. He's afraid to go back to Wilson today."

"Well, I think we can handle that all right," Paul assured her. "Suppose you introduce us and I'll take it from there." He was grateful for anything that might seem a bit more like standard police work, even if it only involved some high-school bullies.

She took him upstairs to the fourth-grade classrooms and they waited in the hall for the end of the school day. "Would you be more comfortable in my office?"

"This is fine." He smiled down at her. "It must be dull working as a grammar-school nurse, isn't it? Don't you get tired of skinned knees?"

"I wish skinned knees were all of it." Her eyes went serious for a moment. "You wouldn't believe some of the things I get — battered children, beaten by their parents the night before, or twelve-year-olds trying pot for the first time. I could tell you stories —"

The bell rang, signaling the end of classes, and almost at once scores of children erupted from the rooms. Angie watched their faces and suddenly reached out to grab a small red-haired boy with a purple bruise on his left cheek. "Tommy, come here!"

"Hi, Nurse Dean, I gotta go to rehearsal."

He tried to pull away, seeing Paul's uniform, but she held him fast. "This is Officer Paul, the Lollipop Cop. He's going to walk over to Wilson High with you today."

"How are you, Tommy?" Paul asked.

"I'm okay," he mumbled, ducking his head in an attempt to hide the bruise. "I don't need nobody to walk with me."

"Come on now," Paul insisted. "We can talk about the play you're in."

Tommy McDonald made a face and started down the stairs. Paul winked at Angie Dean and followed. At the bottom Tommy suddenly said, "There's my Dad."

A stocky dark-haired man stood just inside the door. "Hi, Tommy. I'll give you a ride home."

"I have to go to rehearsal,

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Dad. It's only down the street."

"I forgot that was today." The man smiled at Paul. "The kid's into so much stuff I can't keep it straight."

"I'll walk him over," Paul said. "I'm going that way."

"See you at home, Tommy," his father said as they went out the door. Paul wondered if he'd been concerned about his son's bruises.

Wilson High was less than three blocks away, and walking in the brisk April air Paul found it easy to keep the conversation going. "Do you sing any songs in the play, Tommy?" he asked.

"Sure. I sing *Whistle a Happy Tune* with Anna right at the beginning. She's played by a twelfth-grade girl who's really pretty!"

"Do you have a good voice?"

"I guess so." Reluctantly.

"What about those boys who robbed you and hit you? How many were there?"

"Three."

"Do you know their names?"

"No. I just see them around over there. They pick on little kids. I walk home every day and never had any trouble till I started going there for rehearsals."

"Why didn't you tell your father what happened?"

"He'd get upset. I told him I was just fooling around."

"But you told Nurse Dean the truth."

"She's different. You can tell her things."

The school came into view. Its parking lot and lawn were nearly empty, but Paul spotted the three boys at once. They were younger than he'd expected, perhaps only 13 or 14. As soon as they saw Tommy with a policeman they started to run.

"Go inside," he told Tommy. "I'll talk to them."

He chased them across the parking lot and onto the school's athletic field. The smallest of the three fell back then, panting for breath, and Paul collared him easily. "Do you always run away from policemen?" he asked.

"We didn't do nothin'," the boy insisted.

"What's your name?"

"Wayne Northcoat. Lemme go!"

"Not till you answer some questions. Who are the other boys?"

"I don't know."

Paul tightened his grip. "Come on now."

"All right, Jack and Billy Quinn. They're brothers."

"You're all in the same class?"

"Jack and me are ninth graders. Billy's a year younger."

"What'd you do with the

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money you stole from that boy?"

"What money?"

"All right," Paul decided. "I'm taking you downtown. You're in big trouble, boy."

"Come on, give me a break! Jack and his brother got the money! There was only a ten-dollar bill and three dimes."

Paul released the boy. "I'll go talk to Jack and Billy. Then I'll be back for you."

He watched the boy scramble away and glanced around the field for the others, but they were long gone. He sighed and headed back toward school 37 to get his car.

Angie Dean was in her office, filling in some medical records. He knocked on the frame of her open door and waited for her to look up. "Well—Officer Tower! How'd it go?"

"Okay." He went in and sat down. Nurses' offices had changed little since his own school days. There was still the lumpy cot against one wall, and the array of thermometers and bandages. In his own day her patients would have been mainly girls, worried over some mysterious female disorder or simply wanting a place to rest. For the boys, only an especially bad fall or a bleeding cut would bring them reluctantly to the nurse's office. Today, in some schools, he knew things were different. A Band-Aid is of little value against a stomach wound caused by a switchblade knife.

"Did you see the boys?"

He nodded. "I chased them, caught one, and got the names of the others. I'll talk to them, but I doubt if there'll be any more trouble."

"You're pretty good," she told him admiringly, "for a Lollipop Cop."

"My thanks, kind lady. Any other problems I can handle?"

"Problems I've got plenty of! How about a twelve-year-old girl who might be pregnant?"

"No, thanks!"

"Well, you asked."

"I really have to be getting back downtown. I only stopped in to say hello, because I left my car in your parking lot."

"Come again," she said with a smile.

"I'll do that."

He went downstairs and crossed the faculty lot to his parked patrol car. It was an old model, because they couldn't spare new cars for Lollipop duty, but at least it got him around. There was only one other car in sight, a trim red Mustang that must have belonged to Angie Dean.

He'd started to open the door before he realized there was a man slumped across the front seat. It was a man he'd never seen before, and there was a

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bloody wound in his chest.

Lieutenant Gavin was unhappy. Pacing his tiny glassed-in office the following morning, he had plenty to say to Officer Paul Tower. "Just answer me one thing. Where in hell were you while this guy was getting himself murdered in the front seat of your own patrol car in broad daylight?"

Paul explained once more about walking the McDonald boy to the nearby high school.

"Why didn't you drive him?" Gavin asked.

Paul shrugged. "I never thought of it. The high school was nearby, and the older boys had attacked him on the way. It seemed natural to go over the route on foot."

Lieutenant Gavin settled down. "All right, all right. I suppose there was nothing wrong with it. Was the patrol car unlocked?"

"The ignition was locked, but the doors weren't. Nobody steals things from police cars."

"Or stabs people in them, either."

Paul sighed, "Have they identified him yet?"

Gavin nodded. "A man named Herbert Quinn. He taught at school 37 about ten years ago. Then he divorced his wife and left town. Nobody knows what he's been doing since, or what brought him back yesterday. One of the teachers thought she recognized his picture, and his former wife made positive identification this morning."

"Quinn?"

"Name mean anything to you?"

"Probably not," Paul said. He didn't believe in coincidences. "What's his ex-wife's address?"

Lieutenant Gavin consulted the pad before him. "She's at 76 Rainbow Drive, but leave this one to Homicide, Tower. It's their baby now."

"But it was my car," Paul said. He went back to the squadroom and placed a call to Wilson High School. When he reached a girl in the principal's office he identified himself and requested the home address of two students, Jack and Billy Quinn.

He wasn't surprised when she told him they lived at 76 Rainbow Drive.

The street was a fairly new one, carved out of farmland that straddled the city line. Ranch homes mostly, with young maple trees out front and above-ground swimming pools for the kids in the back. Middle class, young — the sort of street where a police car was a rarity. It was about a mile from Wilson High, and he won-

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dered if the Quinn boys walked to school.

A woman came to the door, standing behind the screen and making no attempt to open it. "Mrs. Quinn?"

"I'm Rachel Quinn. What do you want? I've already talked to the detectives."

"I'm sorry about your husband, but—"

"He wasn't my husband. Hadn't been in more than ten years. Divorced me and went away. I don't know who killed him. It wasn't me." She was a bitter woman whose looks were fading fast.

Paul cleared his throat. "Could I come in? I wanted to talk about your sons."

"Jack and Billy? What about them? They're at school." But she opened the door.

The house was neat but a bit threadbare, like the woman herself. He went into the living room and sat down in a worn flowered armchair. "I thought they might be at home, because of their father."

"They were so small when he left, they don't even remember him. I suppose I'll have to take them to the funeral, though." She brushed a strand of hair from her eyes. "What was it you wanted to say about them?"

"I'm Officer Paul Tower. I tour the grammar schools and talk to the children. Yesterday one of them at school 37 told me your sons and another boy had roughed him up and robbed him this week."

"I'm sure that couldn't be," she said, her face showing no concern. "They're good boys."

"Nevertheless, I'd like to talk to them."

A light seemed to dawn on her. "You must be the Lollipop Cop. The newspapers said Herbert's body was found in your car."

"That's right."

"My boys had nothing to do with that."

"Of course they didn't. Matter of fact, I was chasing them just about the time your former husband must have been stabbed. I just want to give them a little lecture about bullying younger kids, before they find themselves in big trouble."

"You'll have to wait till after school this afternoon. They don't come home for lunch."

"All right," he said. "Perhaps I'll see them there, or else I'll be back." He got to his feet and then asked, "Have you any idea why your ex-husband might have gone back to school 37 yesterday?"

"I don't know. He used to teach there once."

"Did he have any close friends still teaching there?"

"I doubt it."

"Did he ever make any at-

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tempt to see his sons?"

"We hadn't heard from him in ten years, officer."

"You don't know where he was living?"

"No."

"Could I ask you the reason for the divorce?"

She looked away. "There was someone else."

"Do you know her name?"

She turned suddenly, her eyes blazing. "I meant *I* had someone else! Do you find that so difficult to imagine?"

"No."

"We were going to be married after Herbert divorced me. But then it never happened."

"Could I have his name?"

"That doesn't matter now."

"It could matter. Herbert might have come back to settle an old score."

She snorted. "After ten years? Those things only happen in books. These days nobody worries about a love affair that ended ten years ago."

"I'd still like his name."

"All right," she sighed. "Austin Blake. He used to teach at the same school as Herbert."

"School 37?"

"Yes. But he's not there any more. Somebody told me he was raising rabbits now."

A spring rain was beginning to fall when Paul parked his patrol car across the street from school 37 and ran for the door. His schedule called for him to address the higher grades at the school today, but in light of yesterday's killing the speech had been rescheduled for Monday. He shook the droplets of rain from his uniform and climbed the stairs to Nurse Dean's office, aware of the small eyes riveted on him.

"Got a lollipop, officer?" one little girl asked.

"Not today, honey."

Angie Dean was in her office, just finishing the application of an adhesive bandage to a skinned knee. As the boy ran out, she looked up and said, "Caught in the act! And after I told you yesterday about all the serious things!"

"You're allowed one skinned knee," he said.

But her eyes were serious. "Paul, in the newspaper they mentioned the accident last week. Your wife and child ... I'm sorry, I didn't know."

He hadn't thought about Mary since early morning, at breakfast. Now, as the memory intruded once more, he almost resented Angie for reminding him of it. "We have to keep on living," he said.

"But working with all these children—"

"The lieutenant thought it might be good therapy, I guess."

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She looked away, toward the window where the rain was hitting the pane. "Are there any leads to the killer?"

"I don't know what Homicide has uncovered. I've been doing a little sleuthing on my own. That's why I stopped in. You may be able to help."

"I doubt it. They say Herbert Quinn taught here ten years ago. I was still in high school in Cleveland then."

"There was another man who taught here with Quinn. His name was Austin Blake. Think you can find anything on him in the files?"

"I'll try. Sit down and read a magazine. I'll go check the records."

He picked up a copy of *Nursing Outlook* and started to read an article on allergies. But after a few paragraphs he put it down and strolled to the window. Opening the blinds he peered down at the blacktopped faculty parking lot. It was all peaceful today. Not a murderer in sight.

He studied the black and white floor tiles, and the embossed tin ceiling with its flowered design. An old building, put up before World War I, in all likelihood. Why had Herbert Quinn wanted to return to such a place after ten years? And what had been waiting for him here?

"Here's what you wanted," Angie Dean announced, returning with a slip of notepaper. "Austin Blake taught sixth grade here for three years. He stayed on a year after Quinn left, and then resigned. I looked up his address in the phone book if you want it."

"Thanks," he said with a grin. "You're a regular Dr. Watson."

"I hope so." Her face was serious again. "If there's anything else I can do, including a home-cooked meal some night, I'd be glad to oblige."

"Thanks. I guess it's a little soon. . .but thanks."

He went downstairs and crossed the street to his patrol car. This time there was no body in it — only a small boy with his face pressed against the window, searching for another lollipop.

The sign said *AB Rabbitry*, and there was a picture of a jumping jackrabbit on it. Paul Tower glanced at the sign, checked the address, and rang the doorbell. Presently a slender man with thinning gray hair came to the door. "Police?" he asked, a bit startled.

"Officer Tower, sir. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Come in. I was out in back feeding my rabbits."

He led the way through a

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house more cluttered than crowded, to a large rear shed where rows of rabbit cages stood neatly on shelves. Paul looked around in amazement. "What do you do with all these animals?"

"I show them, for prizes. Some of the babies I sell to children at Easter time. Just finished a busy season. That's why some of the cages are empty." As he talked he distributed pellets of food to the animals.

"Did you once teach at school 37, with a man named Herbert Quinn?"

Blake twitched the nose of a black rabbit. "See these? A New Zealand variety I breed special."

"Very nice."

"Who? Quinn? That was a long time ago."

"Ten years."

He thought about it. "Yes, that would be about right."

"You should remember. You were having an affair with his wife."

Austin Blake jerked his head back, as if bitten. "Who told you that?"

"She did."

He sighed and went back to his chore. "I'm glad she still remembers."

"She should. It cost her a husband."

"Yeah. Good old Herb Quinn. He never was much of a teacher, though. I guess he's doing better as a banker."

"A banker? You know more than his ex-wife does."

"Herb and I were friends before it happened. When he found out I didn't marry Rachel, we became friends again. He stops to see me when he comes to town."

"Has he come often?"

"No. Two, three times in ten years. That's not often."

"When was the last time?"

Austin Blake's eyes sharpened. "Why do you want to know?"

"I guess you haven't seen the papers. Herbert Quinn was murdered yesterday, stabbed to death in the parking lot at school 37."

"My God, that was Herb? They hadn't identified the body yet in this morning's paper."

"It was Quinn, all right. When did you see him last?"

"Not in years. But he phoned me two days ago and said he was in town. He was going to try to stop out to see me, but he didn't. I think he had some woman with him. They were staying at the Vacation Inn."

"You say he was a banker?"

Austin Blake nodded. "Not much of a one, really. Assistant manager of a branch in New Hope. That's about a hundred miles from here."

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"Not far," Paul mused. "You'd think he'd have come back more often to see his sons."

"He was seeing them, but Rachel didn't know. He didn't want any contact with her." His eyes had a faraway look, as if he was remembering. "Can't say I blame him."

Paul nodded, caught in his own memories. Mary was gone, but at least his memories were happy ones. "Thanks for your time. I'll be going now."

"Remember me, if you ever need any rabbits."

"A rabbit's foot would be all I'd need. For luck."

"I don't supply those," Austin Blake replied seriously.

The room clerk at the Vacation Inn told him that Mr. and Mrs. Quinn were registered in Room 224. "But I believe they're checking out," he said. "She just called for someone to help with her bags."

"I'll see to it," Paul said. He took the elevator to the second floor and knocked on the door of 224.

A woman with stringy blonde hair opened it. "About time you got here!" Then she saw the uniform and tried to slam the door in his face, but he shoved his foot into the opening.

"Just a few questions, Mrs. Quinn."

"I'm not Mrs. Quinn," she muttered as he forced his way into the room. "What do you want?"

His glance traveled over the packed suitcases. "Herbert Quinn is dead, you know."

"I know. I heard it on the radio this morning. He was the one who got killed in the police car."

"My police car."

She squinted at him. Her face was no longer young, but there was still a hint of some special attractiveness there. "You're the Lollipop Cop?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Dumbest name I ever heard! If you're the Lollipop Cop, I guess I'm the Lollipop Trollop!"

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Susan Stark."

"Your relationship with Herbert Quinn?"

"Friends," she said with a smirk. "There's nothing wrong with it. He's been divorced for ten years. He came back to town to see his kids."

"I know that. Did he see them?"

She nodded. "Two days ago, after school. He met them on the way home, so his ex-wife wouldn't know. He didn't want anything to do with her."

"Do you know who killed him?"

She looked away. "No."

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"Could it have been Rachel Quinn?"

"I don't know. Maybe. He always said she was no good."

"What else did he say?"

She bit her lip, perhaps considering the odds on avoiding a jail cell. "If I tell you, can I go?"

"That depends. I'll do what I can."

"All right," she sighed. "Wednesday night, after he'd seen his boys, he seemed excited. He told me he had an idea for making a lot of money."

"Did he say what the idea was?"

"No, but I think that's where he went yesterday — to see somebody about this money."

"He went to the school yesterday, where he used to teach."

"I don't know about that. I've told you everything I know. Can I go now?"

"I think you'd better stay in town a while longer, Miss Stark."

He picked up the phone and called Lieutenant Gavin. The harsh voice was familiar to his ear. "Tower! Where in hell are you? I thought we'd canceled your schedule for today!"

"I'm working on the Quinn case, Lieutenant."

"I told you, that's Homicide's baby. They've been out at the school all day questioning teachers and pupils."

"I don't think they'll find the answer there, Lieutenant."

"Oh? I suppose you've got something?"

"More than they have, obviously. If they'd have checked the hotel registrations they'd have found Quinn was staying at the Vacation Inn with a lady friend. I'm with her now, in Room 224."

Gavin cursed softly. "Stay there, Tower. We'll send someone down."

"Make it fast. I've got another appointment this afternoon."

Paul Tower's patrol car was parked in front of Wilson High School when classes let out at three o'clock. He spotted Wayne Northcoat immediately, and watched him join the two Quinn brothers. Then, before they could run away again, he pulled his car into the driveway beside them. "Get in, boys," he said. "I don't feel like running today."

"Me, too?" Northcoat asked.

"Not you. I talked to you yesterday."

Jack and Billy Quinn were almost the same size, though it was obvious that Jack was older from the way he monopolized the conversation. "What do you want with us?" he asked as they climbed in.

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"We didn't do anything."

"Then why did you run yesterday?"

"I don't know," Jack Quinn mumbled. He resembled his mother, and already he was developing her bitter tone of voice. "Why are you picking on us?"

Paul ignored the question. "A couple of years from now, you try running from a cop and you'll get a bullet in your leg."

"Yeah," Billy chimed in. "Or in the head!"

"Shut up, brat!" his older brother told him.

"Let's talk about your father," Paul said.

"Our father's dead."

"I know. He died yesterday, right in this very front seat."

They said nothing.

"The seat's still damp from where they washed the blood off. Want to feel it?"

"No," Jack whispered.

"You saw your father Wednesday after school, didn't you?"

There was a silence, and then Jack said, "Yes."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. What do you mean?"

"Wednesday after school was when you roughed up the McDonald boy, wasn't it?"

"I—"

"And your father saw you doing it, didn't he?"

"Yes," Billy admitted.

"What did he do about it?"

Jack Quinn hung his head. "He took the money we got from the kid's pockets. He said he'd give it back. He said he never wanted to catch us doing anything like that again. Hell, the first time we see him in three years and he has to find us like that!"

"It was your bad luck," Paul said. "And his, too."

When Tommy McDonald came out of rehearsal at five o'clock, Paul held open the door of his patrol car. "Get in, Tommy. I'll drive you home."

"That's great! But I could walk. I'm not afraid of them kids any more."

"I'm glad to hear it, Tommy." He steered the car into the street and headed north. After a few blocks he said, "The Northcoat boy said they got ten dollars and thirty cents from you on Wednesday. A ten-dollar bill. That's a lot of money for a boy your age."

"Yeah. Well, I—"

"Where did you get it, Tommy?"

"I earned it."

"Did you, Tommy? Is that why you didn't want your folks to know it was stolen? Or was there another reason? Was it that you stole the ten-dollar bill from your dad?"

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"Here's my house," he said, licking his lips nervously.

Paul saw the stocky dark-haired man come down the steps of the house toward the car. "What's the trouble here?" he asked Paul.

"Hello again, Mr. McDonald. We met yesterday."

"I remember."

Paul patted the boy's head. "Run and play now, Tommy. I have to talk to your dad."

"Talk to me? What about?"

Paul waited till the boy was out of earshot. "About murder, Mr. McDonald. I'm arresting you for the killing of Herbert Quinn."

McDonald looked stricken. He started to move away from the car and then simply stood still. Paul got out and slipped a handcuff over his wrist. "I must advise you of your rights to have a lawyer present before making any statement."

"How did you know?" he asked. That was all.

"Tommy had a ten-dollar bill that he stole from you. The Quinn boys stole it from him and their father, waiting at the high school to see them, witnessed the whole thing. He took the bill, with the intention of returning it. And then he noticed a funny thing. He noticed that the ten-dollar bill was a counterfeit."

"You're guessing now."

"But not too much. Quinn worked in a bank, which gave him experience in spotting phony money. And you run a small print shop. You wouldn't be the first small printer who decided to make money the easy way. Quinn figured the same way. And he tried to shake you down. He met you in the school doorway and asked for money. That's when you stabbed him."

"I didn't mean to! It was an accident!" He started talking, all at once. "His sons knew who Tommy was, because of the play. He called me at home and hinted about the phony money. He said he wanted to see me, at the school. When I got there, you and Tommy were just leaving together. He asked for money. He pointed to you and said he'd tell you otherwise. I guess I went crazy. I had this hunting knife in my pocket—"

"Just by chance."

"—and I stabbed him with it. He just stood there staring at me, as if he couldn't quite believe it. He walked away across the parking lot, toward your patrol car. I guess he thought he could get help there, on your car radio maybe. I figured he wasn't hurt bad, but I panicked and ran. The last I saw he was sitting in the front seat of your car."

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"The wait was too long for him," Paul said. "Come on, let's go."

"Can I tell my wife?"

"You can tell her, but I'll take the keys to your print shop. The Federal authorities are going to want to look at that."

He licked his lips nervously, the way his son had. "Was it Tommy who told you about the money? Or did you know before that?"

"Tommy told me. But I should have known anyway. You told me yesterday you came to the school because you forgot it was rehearsal day. But Tommy told me later he always walked home. You were in the school parking lot for another reason — to meet Herbert Quinn."

"I never knew the man before, never laid eyes on him. And I killed him."

"Who else is in on the counterfeit money?"

"No one, I swear! It was just something I did, alone. And Tommy had to steal one of them!"

They went up the steps of the house to tell Tommy's mother.

On Saturday morning Paul phoned Angie Dean at her apartment.

"Congratulations!" she said. "The papers are giving you full credit for solving the case."

"I had a bit of luck," he admitted. "I found the right people and asked the right questions."

"You'll be a popular speaker with the kids next week—that is, if you're still the Lollipop Cop."

"I guess I am," he said. "After this week I'm beginning to think it's not such a bad job after all."

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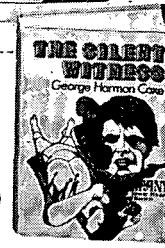

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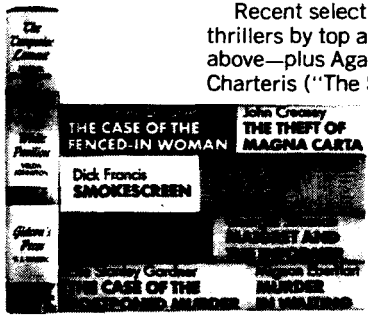

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